



WRITTEN IN FRIENDSHIP

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A BOOK OF REMINISCENCES

BY
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AUTHOR OF "SET DOWN IN MALICE"



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TO
FRIENDS AT 8 ST MARTIN'S STREET

G. R.
P. H.
G. H. W.
A. W. G.
L. A. B.

SOME of the following pages have appeared during the last four years in *The Century Magazine*, *Punch*, *The Saturday Review*, *The Sunday Chronicle*, *The Humorist*, and *Musical Opinion*; but much the greater part of the volume is now printed for the first time.

G. C.

SOUTHSEA,
1923.

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CHAPTER I

THE AMAZING DUBLINERS: W. B. YEATS—MAUD GONNE—
EDWARD MARTYN—J. K. STEPHENS—ST JOHN ERVINE—
GEORGE RUSSELL (“Æ”)

DUBLIN is the most provincial city in the British Isles, for it commits the cardinal error of attempting to be self-sufficient. It has a theatre, a university, a castle, a cathedral, St Stephen's Green, and many public buildings gutted by the fire that was one of the most inconspicuous features of the rebellion of 1916. Of all these it is proud. It has, in addition, its own publishers, its own magazines and newspapers and book-shops, and its own intellectual life. Concerning these it is stridently conceited. And it has its own “society,” of which in these days it never speaks. The spirit of Dublin, looking northward, views Belfast with large contempt; for in that Ulster town money not only talks, but rules, whereas in Dublin the poorest man may be, and generally is, a prince — a prince in his own eyes, but only a seeming prince in the eyes of others.

We all despise money. At least the best people do, and it is in Dublin that all the best people live. Now the human mind is capable of many feats of which the metaphysician knows nothing. It can at once despise money and envy those who possess it; it can hate wealth and yet pursue it. And the Dublin mind, once it has determined to hate anything, does so with extreme thoroughness. In the capital of Ireland poverty

is a virtue, pauperism a state of blessedness. The man who is successful in business is considered both knave and fool, and the poet who writes mediocre verse is a revered genius. So victorious is mind over matter that even the meanest writer obtains a public. A book, just because it is a book, is sacrosanct; the printed page is always astir with genius; above the head of the man with the unwashed neck beat the wings of fame.

Whenever, in hours of boredom, I think of Dublin, I see a thousand men and women writing down words, erasing them, writing them down again and then talking. Talking about themselves. With hot, eager brains functioning with enormous rapidity, they hurry from house to house, from flat to flat, and talk about that sestet they wrote the month before last, that new rhyme of Achitophel and asphodel that J. K. Stephens — or was it Æ? — discovered; that last, unspeakable book of George Moore's, those "bee-loud-glade" verses of W. B. Yeats that with their sweet poison have ruined half the Irish verse of the last two decades, that manuscript over the possession of which Maunsel and the Talbot Press are fighting, that remark that Edward Martyn made the other week to Maud Gonne in his stentorian whisper. *Always* themselves. H. G. Wells in London is merely H. G. Wells in London — that is to say, he is nobody. But Theodore Dreiser in the States is to them not even Theodore Dreiser in the States: he is not permitted an existence. Ibañez may drive his Four Horsemen through the capitals of the world, but the dust and stir of their hoofs are unnoted in Dublin, and Marcel Proust, Gabriele d'Annunzio and Joseph Conrad catch not any true Irish reader in the golden webs they weave. Dublin devours her own books and shrugs disdainful shoulders at the books of the outer

world; acts her own plays and sighs over the vanished Synge; plays her own music — no, Dublin has no music: never an orchestral concert in that proud city from one year to another. So Edward Martyn — George Moore's "dear Edward" — rediscovers Palestrina Sunday by Sunday, and the voice of the folk-singer is heard in that land.

Dubliners are faithful to their gods, and of their gods W. B. Yeats is the most picturesque. I was sitting one dark January afternoon in the drawing-room of Miss Maud Gonne — whose beauty I found ravaged by a recent sojourn in an English jail — when Yeats was announced. I was a stranger, palpably English, and less palpably (I hope) a journalist. He gazed upon me with the timid eyes of a fairy beholding a faun for the first time, and, very wisely, I thought, sat down with his back to the light and faced the sofa on which Miss Gonne and I were resting.

"This," said she, "is Mr Cumberland. He's come to Dublin to write about us all."

Mr Yeats did not share her enthusiasm. Eyelids with beautiful eyelashes hid his sight, and he bent down and did something to the fire with a poker. Then, assuming an exquisite pose, with his wrist on his knee and one of his famous hands depending therefrom slimly and whitely against the black of his trousers-leg, he began to talk of fays, fairies, folk-lore, Fenians, Phoenix Park, and other things beginning with F. I have heard some famous talkers. I have listened while Frank Harris has thundered out his strong, steely wisdom; I have sat, staggered and open-mouthed, while G. K. Chesterton made double paradoxes; and I have been suitably impressed by Sir Hall Caine announcing the fineness of the day in a voice and manner

that suggested he was disclosing the ultimate secret of life: but this was different — different in every way. He talked neither to nor at me. It was pure monologue; just talk; the best kind of talk; talk for talking's sake.

Suddenly, becoming once more aware of my presence, he looked up.

"I thought," said I, "of going to the islands in the west."

It is true the thought had only that moment entered my head, but I believed it would please him. It did.

"Do," said he. "Do. Go there and be yourself. Strange folk live there, Mr Cumberland. A man might well secure a shadowy immortality by living for a few weeks among those men and women. If you went there, you would in a short space become a tradition; things you did would be talked about ——"

"That," I interrupted, "I can well believe."

"Yes; and, as is their way, the folk would weave fantasies about your sayings. Tales would be told, and I dare say songs would be sung. And all that you would have done would have been just to go about your business as any man may do. But a certain largeness — or perhaps I should say intenseness — of manner is required: something vital, yet elusive; above all, something sincere. Yes, you would go for a walk or, maybe, would stand and look at the sea; and that would begin a tale. And when you went back to London there would be, in the islands of the west, strange things said of you and your doings. For you would be, as it were, still alive in their midst. In half-a-century you would be a figure embedded in our folklore, and centuries hence people would still be speaking of you, though in your own land your name would be on the lips of none."

Miss Gonne gave me a look of approval as Mr Yeats' musical voice died away, but I do not think she had previously suspected that I was at all the kind of personality likely to insinuate itself into Irish folk-lore.

"A strange people," said I gravely.

"You are right," he agreed. "And a kindly people, a good people. Children they always seem to me — the most delightful children in all the world." He mused. "But," he remarked dreamily, "these are the rains of winter. You must wait till the fine days come."

"Oh no," I replied; "I must go at once. What you have said has fascinated me. I love to think that A.D. 2120 some German professor like — well, like Kuno Meyer may go to those islands and study there and write a learned, but completely unconvincing, pamphlet on the great hero Cumberland and all the fine things he said and did two hundred years ago."

He gazed at me earnestly through his pince-nez.

"Stranger things even than that have happened. For example ——"

I shall always regret most bitterly that I did not listen to the story that followed. But the truth is, I was so closely occupied in studying his personality that I heard here and there only a phrase. Besides, I was seduced by the music of his voice. Never had I heard a human voice so perfectly cadenced, so exquisitely modulated. Its tone was round and full, its timbre most sweet; and it suggested the gentlest of gentle melancholies.

"How splendidly he does it!" I said to myself as I listened. "How perfect and complete the pose! Years of assiduous practice have gone to the making of this so delicate work of art."

But a few minutes later I surrendered myself

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completely to him, and vowed again that never would I, even secretly to myself, accuse him of insincerity, of acting, of seeking to make an impression. Time has turned him into the elf he copies. He is a little more than human. One very early morn fifty years ago the fairies gathered about his cradle.

Miss Gonne urged me to return to her house that evening. Not without enjoyment and, I verily believe, some malicious amusement had she watched Yeats reacting to my personality, and perhaps she wished to observe the effect I would have on J. K. Stephens, George Russell ("Æ"), Edward Martyn and other friends of hers I met at nine that night.

But when the evening came I found I was to have little talk with anyone save Miss Gonne, for I made the mistake of telling her that since my visit that afternoon I had written a short impressionistic article on her. She smiled that secret, gratified smile that even the cleverest of us cannot entirely restrain when we are flattered. Moreover, I called this courageous, tempestuous creature "Madam" — by mistake, I do believe — and the word pleased her. She took me to a corner of the room, her tall, slightly stooping figure, clad entirely in white, taking possession of me as a hen takes possession of her chickens.

"You've written something about *me*?" she asked.

"Yes. It's rather nice, I think. I've got you. I describe this large, bare room, the white flowers growing proudly on your little tables, your face of suffering, your eloquence, and — and so on."

She leaned forward.

"Sit here," she invited, and indicated two chairs that chance — *was* it? — had placed in that remote region of the room. We sat down side by side. and I

began to read in my rather indistinct voice the little sketch I had so carefully and, it seemed to me, so beautifully painted in four or five hundred *mots justes*.

She was disappointed. I could feel it, though, when I had finished, she was kind enough to say:

"Very pretty. But, really, Mr Cumberland, do you honestly think I'm like that?"

"To me you are."

"But you've described a rather battered angel, and I'm anything but an angel. I'm a rebel — an ex-jail-bird, if you like — a woman full of anger and indignation, a political ——"

She confided to me stories of plots, escapes, sufferings, police futilities, intrigues. But there was little in what she told me that I did not already know, for Maud Gonne's romantic career, her passionate sacrifices of self, and her superb devotion to her country are known to all who have studied Ireland's fate. But I listened intently, and did not speak until she had finished and there had been silence for many moments.

"But that is all beyond my powers," I said. "I cannot write of those things. My pen is light and satirical and, they tell me, malicious."

She held out her hand for the article I had written and I gave it to her. As she read it she smiled.

"Very well, print it. So far as it goes it's true enough, but it doesn't go very far."

Later on I heard a deep, vibrant voice, and saw a huge, white-haired, florid man who, by the aid of a stick and restricted by gout, was stumping heavily about the room. I questioned Miss Gonne with my eyebrows and said:

"'Dear Edward?'"

She nodded.

"Ought I to be introduced?"

"Oh yes; most certainly."

She took me to Edward Martyn, a kindly, self-important and entirely humourless man who, looking into my candid eyes, took me to his heart at once. He talked with an almost passionate interest in his own words — church music; masses; John McCormack, whom, it appeared, he had years ago employed in his choir; and, eventually and inevitably, Palestrina. He became lyrical and dramatic by turns; in moments of excitement his loud voice rose to a noble shout. Fascinated by the manner rather than by the man, I stood half hypnotised. But church music is not one of my subjects, and knowing that this strange man had another god besides Palestrina, and that god Wagner, I waited for an opportunity to breathe his name. As I write, I am teased by my inability to remember anything that Edward Martyn said, though I am confident that his words were wise, his opinions just, and his discretion all (and perhaps more than) it should have been. Occasionally, sometimes in the deep middle of a sentence, he would pause to breathe, and I would form my lips for the enunciation of the word "Wagner"; but before the sound could come he had started again. I remember well looking full on his face, and from the tail of my eye seeing J. K. Stephens moving about the room like a leprechaun.

At last my moment came. Martyn stuck at a name.

"All that influence," he was saying, "all that Pre-Raphaelite influence has now died down, I think. Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Holman Hunt, and — er — tut — tut — his name's on the tip of my tongue — Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Holman Hunt, and — er —"

"Richard Wagner," I suggested imperturbably.

I met with amazing success. It was just as though a man, walking sturdily along the road to Lourdes, had been lifted bodily into the air and placed, unresisting and unbewildered, on the road to Chicago. The little light of Palestrina faded in the sun of Wagner; Rome's splendours were hidden behind the ugly theatre of Bayreuth.

If Martyn had been earnest before, he was now possessed by a veritable *furor loquendi*. His voice thundered. I heard:

“Wahnfried — Siegfried — Richard — Cosima — Bayreuth — Cosima — Richard — Siegfried — Wahnfried — Richard — Frau von Wesendonck.”

This was real eloquence. His soul was alight; his intellect was burning. He drowned me in the torrent of his words, and later on, when we walked downstairs together, my arm beneath his for his support, he was hotly dithyrambic. His car was waiting, and as he, not without effort, clambered into it, he discoursed on the relative merits of Minna and Cosima. Five minutes later we were outside the Grosvenor Hotel, where I was staying, and he was promising to dine with me the following Friday, when, I assured him, innocent fish only should appear on our table. But, alas! that dinner was never eaten, for on the following day I was summoned hastily to Belfast to listen to music.

J. K. Stephens, as I have said, is like a leprechaun in appearance, and, at least when talking to me, in manner like someone not very successful on the Stock Exchange. He is a cocksure little man; he knows about it all. He *knows*. He said he believed in “inspiration,” in not writing save “when the mood was on him”; he added something about “one book every two or three years.”

“To live on?” I queried.

He took this little question as an affront, and I distinctly saw him bridle.

"Many men write more," I said in a conciliatory tone. "H. G. Wells, for example."

"Yes; but what is it all about?" he asked. "What is Wells trying to say?"

"At the moment?"

"Oh, any time."

"He's said a lot — about aeroplanes, for example, and sex and science and marriage and religion and sociology and our national hypocrisies and ——"

"Yes, I dare say," he interrupted contemptuously.

"You don't read Wells?"

"When I read, I either read the newspaper, my letters, or — literature."

"Quite," said I. "I see we don't agree."

This conversation took place in a large room of the Irish National Gallery on the day following my visit to Miss Gonne's. Stephens was sitting at a desk doing clerical work, and though he seemed very willing, nay, eager, to talk to me, he did not invite me to be seated; indeed throughout our interview I did not detect anything in his manner that led me to believe he was likely to do so.

"I have recently come back from a year's stay in Paris," he said, "but it's not my *milieu*. It has atmosphere, of course, but not *my* atmosphere."

Paris, I felt, was condemned.

"Perhaps you don't speak or read French?" I asked, and he admitted that he did not. "But now you're back in Dublin ——"

"Oh yes, I shall write, but not at present. The mood delays, but it will come."

"And then?"

"Oh, I don't know. Perhaps a book of poems. Or a story. One does not force these things. They arrive."

"Without effort?"

Did I, indeed, intend to be rude?

"I don't believe any good writing is accomplished without hard work, though, of course, the work may all have been done before the hour of writing. On one or two occasions I have written an enormous amount in a few weeks; then, again, a year or two may pass in which I produce only a few pages."

It was, I admit, indiscreet of me to mention George Moore, but I did. He froze. There is not much hero-worship about Stephens. Some people worship others; others have a good conceit of themselves. I felt that an effort was being made to impress me; it did not greatly succeed.

"I consider George Moore a very great writer," I said; "to my mind, a greater writer even than Joseph Conrad. *Esther Waters* is at least as fine as *Madame Bovary*."

"Oh, I dare say, I dare say," he muttered impatiently, and picked up a book from his desk. This, I felt, was dismissal indeed.

So I turned to go. He relented; but he had nothing more to say, and five minutes later, when out in the street, I told myself what I have often told myself:

"How like his books he is!"

And yet how unlike! But I know well that my personality antagonised him, for I was not a worshipper. I can imagine that with the right sort of person, in the right sort of place, at the right sort of time, he might be as charming as one of the pages of beaten gold of which his books are composed; but time, place and person on

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this occasion were all that they ought not to have been.

That evening I sat in the stalls of the Abbey Theatre and witnessed one of the clever, but drab and rather sordid, plays of St John Ervine. This theatre, about which much has been written, is dreadfully *vieux jeu*. Strangely using the past tense, they say it has been a barn. The people who entered it were rather like the people I used to meet in the repertory theatres in Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham, consciously high-brow, palely anæmic. Consciously high-brow is St John Ervine himself. He lived in Dublin for a short period as manager or "art director," or whatever it is he called himself, of the Abbey Theatre; but he was not very popular or, I believe, very successful, and he returned to London, that simple city where it is easy to make headway.

I should like to have met Ervine in Dublin. In London, working on a Labour paper, I found him supercilious, exclusive, and free from geniality; but in Ireland's capital, I am told, he was æsthetic and literary dictator, a position he would have esteemed.

I fell to thinking of Ervine as, late at night, I walked, depressed and disappointed, from the Abbey Theatre to my hotel. Here, said I to myself, is a typical Irishman — that is to say, a pushful man with brains; a man who, at all costs, will "get on" in the world; a man who saves and is careful; a man who works with an almost desperate energy. He has all the qualities with which the traditional Irishman is not endowed. But the traditional Irishman never existed outside the novels of Lever. Bernard Shaw also conforms to type. Only the other day I saw him in Leicester Square, clad gravely and respectably in black and almost offensively

clean, the Puritan *in excelsis*. The Irishman of tradition is fond of leaning against the bar of a public-house, but Bernard Shaw does not even take the whisky bottle from the cellaret. W. B. Yeats thinks inns are picturesque, but has not George Moore recorded that in the old days this poet's refreshment at midday was a bun and a glass of milk? No, the feckless, jolly, generous, drinking Irishman has been created for literary-commercial purposes. Synge's play-boy is the result of two generations of careful fiction and deliberate lying. It is in St John Ervine and Bernard Shaw that one sees the typical Irishman; a fellow who, despite his imagination and sympathy, lives with one eye on the Muse and the other on the cash-box.

On the evening of the following day I was taken to see George Russell, far and away the greatest Irishman of the present generation. Poet, painter, politician, mystic, editor, man of business, organiser, his life is full to overflowing. So great is his genius for friendship that men of directly opposite political beliefs find in him their ideal man.

It was a Sunday, I remember, and as I entered the room and swept my gaze round the semicircle of black-coated men sitting before the generous fire I thought how respectable, how Sunday-ish, and how provincial the little gathering looked. All had donned their best clothes, greased their hair, and assumed a manner of finicking fastidiousness that is often to be seen in Irishmen of education. One notices that kind of fastidiousness in men who are aware that they are "not quite" gentlemen and are yet anxious to be a little more than gentlemen.

The room was large and comfortable. At one end were windows; at the other were folding-doors or

curtains, I forget which, cutting it off from a second and somewhat smaller room. There were books in plenty. On the walls hung a number of paintings from the brush of George Russell himself. Before sitting down I glanced at these, and immediately received the impression that I was surrounded by works of a vital and striving beauty whose essence was of another world than this. And during the next couple of hours, while I was exasperated and depressed by the brilliant, barren talk, I saw vividly in my mind's eye (for my back was turned on the pictures) light and beauty and mystery walking hand in hand on a pathway of stars.

I was fated to witness a competition of cleverness. Almost everyone "showed off" with fatal ill breeding. They said not the true thing, but the brilliant thing. They argued not to track Truth to her lair, but to disclose their own smartness. The air was alive with epigrams; now and again a little satirical laugh would tear the ear like the ripping of calico. Woodrow Wilson and Lord French became butts for malevolence to aim at. This leaping agility of mind, this constant striving for effect, was, strangely enough, called into being solely by the desire to impress their host who, it was clear, is the last man in the world to look favourably upon the quick sparkle of alert intellects. For some time this big, bearded man, with his great shoulders and face in which there is no guile, remained silent and ruminative, only occasionally intervening to state in simple, quiet words views so wise that in a moment they annihilated the brilliant twaddle of which he and I had for long been the unwilling victims.

I rose quietly, and having left the circle, wandered slowly round the room, stopping for a brief space before each wonderful picture. They tell me that George

Russell cannot draw or paint. I do not know, for of these things I have little technical knowledge. But I do know that the beauty lavished on those spread canvases pierced me instantly and left me wondering at the strangeness of the soul of man that, dwelling in our fleshly habitation, can hold commerce with the unseen and impalpable.

I did not return to the circle that night. I sat apart, waiting for Russell's voice, watching his every movement, trying in vain to capture his secret. All I saw was a kindly, humorous, wise man of enormous tact and great toleration. If vanity is the womb of genius, then Russell has no genius. He is simple, he is courteous, he is free from pose. Best of all, he does not talk cleverly.

When at midnight I left, he accompanied me to the hall door, and I could not but feel as he took my hand that I had for some few hours been in the presence of a man of noble mind and strange, disturbing genius.

And I know well that throughout my life I shall be accompanied by a quick, vivid memory of his painted dreams.

CHAPTER II

ARTHUR SYMONS — HAROLD MONRO — JAMES AGATE —
C. G. D. ROBERTS — THOMAS MOULT — CARADOC EVANS —
BELFORT BAX

ARTHUR SYMONS is like a ghost from the past. Those of us who have just entered the forties find it difficult sometimes to believe he is still with us. Since our childhood his name has been familiar. He was a contemporary of so many men who have since died of drugs or alcohol, or who have slipped away by hidden, devious paths. Hubert Crackanthorpe, Ernest Dowson, Oscar Wilde, Francis Thompson, Lionel Johnson, Aubrey Beardsley, Henry Harland, and many, many more men of genius were his friends or acquaintances. His age, with their age, has gone: the last decade of the nineteenth century is now a matter of history: we have forsworn so-called decadence. The literary genius of to-day must be "respectable" if he is to count at all; the drawing-rooms of Hampstead have ousted the public-houses of Fleet Street.

It is better so. Is it better so?

But Arthur Symonds still lingers — lingers like a pale ghost. The other month I saw him in the Café Royal, sitting where Frank Harris used to sit. He startled me with his picturesqueness, his ivory face, his vivid, passionate eyes. . . . The Café, these days, has no wit, no camaraderie, no hot interest in art or letters. Now and again a man of letters will stroll in, seeking to

breathe the atmosphere of former days, but he strolls out again, unsatisfied. Youth has gone: our young men are all middle-aged. The war? Perhaps. For whatever reason, all is changed.

But listen. Arthur Symons speaks. "Yes: it was wonderful. Like distant music: like Pachmann playing. Those deft, magic hands of Pachmann's — yes, yes! Nothing in our present art-world is so mysteriously beautiful as Pachmann's music. He plays for me. When he sees me, he embraces me: he recognises in me the genius he himself possesses. Silky music — like long strands of purple silk, glossy, full of sheen. It comes: it goes: silence before and silence after. Poetry ineffably sweet, profoundly mournful."

Symons' eyes dilate with wonder; he throws his hands into the air, seeking by gesture to communicate the incommunicable. But I understand him well, for I also have listened to Pachmann, drugged to rapture by his music. Is there something in Pachmann that recalls to Symons the old days when youth itself was an intoxicant, and life a vision, and art the gateway to Heaven? I think there is. . . . Exotic — that is the word. Beardsley was exotic. *The Yellow Book* swam in sultry haze; the smell of heliotrope, the strong musky scent of tigers was in that literary and artistic jungle. . . . No longer do we live fiercely, as we did then. It is all gone, gone.

Harold Monro came breathlessly to me.

"He has no manners — Symons has no manners. I spoke to him of The Poetry Bookshop, and he declared he had never heard of it — just like the man who asked 'What are Keats?' Never *heard* of it, Cumberland."

"Even so, Monro? After all, he *may* have told you the truth."

“Impossible!”

Apart, I mused, telling myself that perhaps I was none the better for having heard of The Poetry Bookshop. “Shop.” Rather splendid, that “shop.” Does it pay? Did they ask that question in the far-off nineties? Why should Symons have heard of a shop? . . . Monro went to seek sympathy elsewhere.

I looked at Symons: he was on the far side of the large room now — at least fifteen paces away; yet I could see the colour of his eyes. I hate to use so commonplace a simile, but they were like precious stones: large, deep, beautiful. . . . If you stand five paces from me, I cannot detect the colour of your eyes: at that distance all eyes are the same. But not Symons’ eyes. Full of colour, they glow in the calm ivory of his face. . . . I watched him as he talked.

If to talk picturesquely is to talk well, then Symons is an admirable talker. But only rarely is he in an expansive mood. Your true talker is always ready for the game, provided he has a listener worthy of him. But Symons must wait upon his mood. He talks nervously, rapidly, a little elliptically; he demands from you almost as much as he gives: that is why listening to him is so exciting. In descriptive power I have never heard his equal. He paints picture after picture before your dazzled eyes; if he pauses, it is only to gather together energy for another geyser-like blossoming of words. Frail, eager and brittle, he is like much of his work. But his spirit dwells almost alone in these days. There are but a few spirits that touch his — Baudelaire, Verlaine, Villiers de l’Isle Adam: their followers have “dated” disastrously. We are all for vigour and efficiency and brutality. New poets come and sassoon and lawrenciate. To none of us is life any

longer a diffuse pattern of subtle, dark moods. . . . It is better so. It *is* better so.

It would be almost an impertinence on my part to hail James Agate as a great dramatic critic. Those who are always, and instinctively, in search of brilliant, yet sound, writing have already discovered him in the pages of *The Sunday Times*; they possess at least two of his volumes of essays, and they have read that muscular, stunning novel, *Responsibility*. But there are many who, though loving literature, do not know, in these crowded, shouting days, where literature may be found. I do no more here than point out the place.

I shudder when, counting the decades, I realise that I have known Agate more than thirty years. . . . I detest age, middle age: it is one of the things in myself I can never forgive. . . . He and I, as boys not yet in our teens, were at the same village Grammar School. Harold Brighouse, the author of *Hobson's Choice*, was another schoolfellow; but Brighouse in those days was abnormally shy, and he stood apart in the playground, bewildered by the noisy little world into which he had been thrown. Agate, on the other hand, was all vigour and dash: he excelled in football and cricket, and, later on, in tennis: he played the piano admirably, and seemingly without practice: he sang well enough to gain a half-prize in that art (I gained the other, each of us receiving a copy of Hall Caine's *The Bondman*): he was provokingly clever at Latin and French, his perfect French accent staggering even our terrible M. Rademacher: and he was full of ideas.

Twenty years passed, during which we met but once or twice. Then, suddenly, I became aware of a new portent in Manchester journalism. Disturbing dramatic

criticism began to appear in one of the morning papers — a paper that, hitherto, had been conducted on the assumption that the public takes no interest whatever in literature or any of the arts. One wondered vaguely what this particular kind of criticism was doing in this particular kind of journal; its proper place, obviously, was *The Manchester Guardian*. . . . The new, disturbing writer was Agate. He wrote with enormous gusto, no small knowledge, and with an air of vast authority. In Manchester a new talent does not go long without notice, and soon many of us were reading Agate as a matter of course, just as, in previous days, we had read Bernard Shaw in *The Saturday Review* and William Archer in *The World*. But we hardly thought Agate would last long: he was too lively and much too spectacular a figure to remain long in so unsympathetic a *milieu*. . . . There came a day when he received a cheque in quarterly payment of his services. . . . Various stories are extant as to what happened, but the most widely accepted are the following: — (1) He endorsed the cheque, gave it to his taxi-driver, and sent a challenge to fight to the proprietor of the newspaper. (2) He tore the cheque into excessively small pieces, which, with a letter of consummate polish, he sent by registered post to his editor. (3) He cashed the cheque, spent it royally in the French Restaurant of the Midland Hotel, and then, at midnight, telephoned to his editor that they were no longer on speaking terms. Which of these legends is true, I know not. For myself, I believe them all.

But, of course, Agate went on writing dramatic criticism, only his work appeared now in *The Manchester Guardian*. G. H. Mair, A. N. Monkhous and Stanley Houghton were fellow dramatic critics of his, but Agate

outshone them all in his brilliancy. His writing glowed with a hard, gem-like flame. (Heavens! I'm still quoting Pater, even in middle age.) He became a figure in Manchester. He was feared by the dramatist, liked by the actor, and regarded with incredulous amazement by the public.

Admirable though his work was in *The Manchester Guardian*, it did not possess the maturity, the poise and the ripe wit of his articles now appearing week by week in *The Sunday Times*. But why doesn't he write a play? Perhaps because he is too heavily engaged in a variety of other occupations. Many talents and interests are too often a snare. Agate is devoted to horses: he has bought and bred them: and if there is a horse show in a place as far away as Ecclefechan you may be certain he will visit it. He is plucked aside by music: he plays the piano well. His interest in French literature is almost an obsession. For the theatre he has an unending passion. He is a conscientious craftsman, and studies assiduously the art of writing. Business also occupies him, and until recently he owned (and, I believe, managed) a shop in Lambeth. He has written one novel that only just escaped being a masterpiece. With so many occupations to absorb him, he will scarcely find time to write a play. Yet I know of no man whose natural genius could more profitably be directed towards dramatic creation.

The man himself? . . . Vigorous, alert, direct. In speech he is frank with men, beguiling with women. Once I heard him tell a well-known novelist that he had tried, but had failed, to read one of the latter's books. "I don't like your writing," he said; "besides, you shouldn't use French phrases that no Frenchman would dream of using." To me he said on another occasion:

"Why do you underline everything? Do you think your readers stupid?" Then he smiled suddenly. "I dare say they are," he went on; "you, of course, know best. But I should like to see you taking your art seriously. In one of your short stories you write of two butterflies 'kissing' each other. Detestable! You must cultivate your taste more." Then, one day, I gave him a book of literary sketches I admired. Having read a few pages, he slapped the book down on a marble-topped table in the Waldorf Hotel. "Rubbish!" he pronounced. "But, surely ——" I began to remonstrate. He turned to me with a grim smile. "I won't discuss it. Take it from me — the book's bad." That was three years ago. Looking at the volume to-day, I know he was right. . . . Again. "There is a menial in this restaurant," he said one day at lunch, "who earns £200 a year. I spent a year writing *Responsibility*. Did I receive £200 for it? I did not." "Nor," said I, "did half the great writers of the last century and this receive half that sum for their first novel." He looked at me in anger. "Damned rotten shame!" he said hotly.

He talks quickly and eagerly. He loves to entrap the unwary. We were talking of the titles of stories on one occasion. (Agate is good at titles. One of his volumes of essays is called *Buzz Buzz*.) "I will never have a catchpenny title," he said, "nor will I ever have one of my books issued in a scarlet cover. Titles sell, I have no doubt, and so, I am told, do multi-coloured 'jackets.' Talking of hopeless titles, what do you think of *The Story of a Poor Lonely Man*?" "Ruby M. Ayres?" I queried. "No. Balzac." He had trapped me, and he grinned delightedly. (But that was not the title; I have forgotten it.)

Never has he given me a word of praise, though I have often longed for it. It is a hard circumstance that the men whose work I most admire are precisely the men who think my own books are the smallest of small beer. "You are irresponsible," Agate once told me. "People allow you to write what you want. Why? Because they think you are negligible." . . . I'm afraid many of them do. But I do so wish they didn't. I am hurt by hostile reviews. Agate is merely contemptuous of them. Agate is right. I must cultivate his serenity.

Can you imagine O. Henry in Mayfair? — or H. G. Wells at a Church Congress? — or Battling Siki at the Royal Academy? . . . Until four years or so ago I had always pictured C. G. D. Roberts as a large, bearded man hunting among Canadian snows. But I found him, late one Saturday afternoon, at a jazz dance in the Temple. I was thirsty, and it was while I was carefully searching shelves, tables and cupboards for a possible drink that I came across a short, serious man in the uniform of a Major, who, on being introduced to me, began to talk of literary matters. At first I could not place him, for "Mr Roberts" conveyed nothing to me. . . . Initials are everything in most names. What would Shaw be without G. B., or Bennett without Arnold? . . . But when I understood that my new acquaintance was C. G. D. I looked at him in amazement. . . . I found him deadly serious about the literary life, the prices per thousand then being paid, and so on. A jazz band tore his sentences to shreds. The war just having ended, everybody was madly hilarious, drunk with hectic joy. But C. G. D. Roberts seemed isolated from all that noise. Not I, however.

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I wished to talk to him, but could not. A woman, passing, whispered an absurdity in my ear. So Roberts and I exchanged addresses, but I, as is my way, lost his before the day was over.

A few months later, when he sent me a volume of his fine and scholarly verse, I realised what I had missed in not renewing his acquaintance. But men like Roberts ought not to be seduced to jazz dances. What is modern vulgarity to him, or he to modern vulgarity?

Thomas Moulton is a genuine poet very conscious of his gifts and of his mission in life. He once pointed out W. J. Turner to me—we were in the Bechstein Hall—in a manner that implied he had no use for W. J. Turner.

“But,” I protested, “he is a Georgian poet. He is among the anointed. He has dined with Eddy Marsh.”

“So have I,” said Moulton, doing his utmost to drown the note of triumph in his voice.

“How splendid!” I remarked. “How does one secure an invitation?”

“You must publish a volume of poems.”

“Ah! But the kind of volume I should publish would not admit me to the sacrosanct squirearchy. No, Tommy Moulton. I like to be a little Ishmael. But tell me, why don’t you like W. J. Turner?”

“He has no Vision. All that crowd is without Vision.”

This to me sounded very provincial. Suddenly I seemed carried back to the days of my boyhood when people descanted largely on the “messages” of great writers. For myself, I hate messages; I distrust people with Large, White Souls. . . . And Vision—what did Moulton mean by Vision? I did not know. I might

have asked him, of course; but if I had, he most assuredly would have told me: that I could not face.

"Turner, I gather, is not one of your Voices."

"No. But D. H. Lawrence is."

"I admire Lawrence enormously. But I thought we were talking of Vision."

But he made no answer, for at that moment Moiseiwitsch began to play Brahms. Ten minutes later there was an interval for conversation.

"Wonderful pianist, Moiseiwitsch," I remarked.

"Yes. Splendid hands. But he has no Soul."

"Look here, Moulton, what is all this new jargon about Vision and Soul?"

He regarded me pityingly for a moment and began to fumble in his inside coat-pocket. After a prolonged struggle he pulled forth a mass of letters, concert tickets, programmes, pocket-books.

"I've got a letter from Quiller-Couch about my magazine, *Voices*. . . . Where the dickens is it? I had it this morning. . . . Here's one from Lawrence."

"Thanks. I see Mr Lawrence is going to write for you. Do you pay your contributors?"

"No."

"Then perhaps you'll print something of mine?"

"Well . . . You see, Cumberland, I'm not extraordinarily keen on your verses —"

"Nor," I interrupted, "was I on yours when I used to print them in *The Daily Citizen*. Yet, you will recollect, you were always paid for them."

"But I sent you only my worst stuff."

"I see. But you appeared glad to have your name printed."

In spite of this not altogether pleasant conversation, I sent Moulton a long ballad I had written: many years

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previously it had been praised by Ford Madox Hueffer who regretfully wrote to me that he did not "dare" to print it in *The English Review*. Now Hueffer is a man of great moral courage, and I scarcely expected that Moulton would publish anything from which Hueffer had shrunk. Nor did he.

A few months later I met him in a bookshop. He appeared slightly confused.

"I was just going to write to you, Cumberland," he said.

(All editors are just going to write to you when they don't know what on earth to do with a MS. you have sent them.)

"How nice of you," I said maliciously.

"Your poem . . . well, you know, it isn't 'quite.'"

"Frank Harris admires it."

"Frank Harris? My dear fellow!"

"Yes. You don't like his politics?"

"No, I don't. His name is scarcely mentioned now."

"I mention it. Frequently."

"You shouldn't."

"No? But, Moulton, he has written some fine books. What the deuce has his writing to do with his rotten politics?"

He shook his head.

"I know," I said. "He has no Vision."

"No. You're right, Cumberland. He's like the rest of them — no Vision."

I smiled.

"Vinegar, veal and venison are very good victuals. I vow. Remember that, Moulton. And vapid and vaporous visionaries are very vindictive. . . . Wonderful morning. Good-bye, Moulton."

He gave me a troubled look as I darted away across Charing Cross Road.

Moult is a sentimentalist. The novel he has published is like a lovely frosted Christmas card. But he is a likeable fellow, and it is pleasant sometimes to hear his sweet voice piping in the woodland wild. I do wish, however, that he would refrain from writing on music. No subject lets a man down so quickly and crashingly as music. It demands so much knowledge. All capable journalists can write with some sort of plausibility on most subjects, but music is not one of them: it bites the hand that caresses it.

Caradoc Evans is one of those writers of genius who do not fit into our modern civilisation. I suppose I detest his work as heartily as the next man, but it wrings from me a genuine, if reluctant, admiration. More than anything else, it reveals to me that its author has suffered intensely, that he still suffers because his soul demands hurt and injury. . . . Most of us get what we secretly and all unconsciously desire. We give what destiny requires of us and in doing so reach a blossoming and fruition. . . . Suffering has crushed out of Caradoc Evans those salt-bitter, cruel stories of Welshmen that he gave us during the war. There is in them something malignant, sinister.

Evans himself is soft-spoken, shy, a little nervous. Who would guess that beneath that rather uncouth exterior there dwells a mind both subtle and delicate? His ugly, interesting face is as blind as a thick mask: I mean, it gives you nothing, no single clue. It was Tommy Pope who introduced me to Evans in the Cheshire Cheese. Now Pope is genial, charming and full of dry humour. Evans is dour, repressed and

utterly without the graces that attract even moderate liking. It was, then, curious to see these two men together, Evans staring rather owlily over his glass, and Pope, with his rapid eyes and gentle, mischievous voice, creating an atmosphere that seemed to exclude the unhappy Welshman who, silent and at sea, sipped his uncomfortable drink.

The history of Caradoc Evans' childhood has been related by a sympathetic friend. It reads painfully. There is in all genius a childlike element — something of fresh wonder and amaze; it pierces one to read of this delicate and beautiful thing being tortured by circumstance and environment. But out of Evans' suffering a dark wisdom has come. If, as seems likely, his work makes him more enemies than friends, I do not think he can regret this. He has reason to be suspicious of mankind.

The Women's Suffrage movement had no more coldly intellectual opponent than Belfort Bax. I used to read his articles in *The New Age* with a feeling of deep irritation, wondering as I did so what bitter experiences he had encountered to make him so hostile to the emancipation of women. . . . How foolish, in this year, does that phrase, "Emancipation of women," sound! Emancipation from what? From themselves? . . . Myself, I was all for the suffrage, cajoled to that standpoint by my ineradicable sentimentalism. So I disliked Bax intensely. I pictured him as bearded, yellow and liverish. I saw him ruthlessly trampling on prostrate women, and my sense of humour did not prevent me from seeing him as an unexampled libertine, grossly indifferent to all delicacy and incapable both of humour and geniality.

How foolish it is to believe that we can see a man in his writings! Though I have no doubt whatever that every author puts himself into his books, I am not to be persuaded that he is to be seen there even by the most subtle of psychologists. For every creative artist is profoundly secretive in regard to himself: he appears to give himself in his work — appears to explore and reveal the innermost ramification of his complex nature, and unfold the last convolution of his brain. And, indeed, perhaps he does so. But that revelation is carefully and elaborately obscured; false scents are laid; it is all a masquerading. You see me in my books? I believe not. In no place am I more carefully concealed than in those words of mine that I have printed.

Bax in the flesh contradicts in every particular the picture of him I had conjured up from his writings. He is fatherly. There is in him a seeming innocence and inexperience that must deceive many. Like many oldish people, he asks you questions the answers to which he already knows. His voice is kind and soft. Impossible to imagine him disagreeing with anybody! Incredible that he should attack either people or principles! He regards the world with eyes that seem to be satisfied with all they behold, though there can be very little in the present stage of our civilisation that can altogether please him.

I was told that in his youth he was "intended for" the musical profession, and he confided to me that he had composed a little. As I also have dabbled in this (to me) most mysterious art, we agreed to exchange "pieces." I played him a little song I had written, and he in return regaled me with one of his own works. . . . Years ago a famous musical critic, after listening

most patiently to my musical settings of three of Blake's poems, turned to me blandly and said: "Well, Cumberland, I shouldn't say that you were *not* musical." . . . When I played these songs to Bax, I was afraid I might hear from him an echo of the musical critic's condemnation. But that is not Bax's way. He purred a gentle approval. When he played me his own composition, I understood from what source his nephew, Arnold Bax, has derived his genuine and very great talent.

CHAPTER III

LORD BERNERS, MR GOOSSENS AND THE GREAT BRITISH
PUBLIC — ARTHUR BLISS — WILLIAM WALLACE — MARTIN
SHAW — JOHN IRELAND — RUTLAND BOUGHTON — ETHEL
SMYTH

MUSICAL composition in this country suffers at the moment from the exasperation and irritation of extreme youth. There are scores of bright and promising youths (and one or two maidens) who, seeking attention from their elders, caper and cavort in the utmost high spirits. They are like children somersaulting in the nursery. Whilst disdaining their parents and uncles and aunts, they are acutely conscious of them. Indeed at heart they seek their praise. We all know the clever youth who, living in the suburbs and feeling himself unappreciated, seeks attention by professing extravagant views on religion, politics or food. From certain aspects he is amusing; but in the course of time he palls.

Young men of this type abound in London's music. Most of them are crude and unlicked, some are subtly adventurous and exhibitionistic, but all are excellent musicians. They disdain emotion. Human feeling makes them shy. Romanticism is the unspeakable thing. Sound — patterned sound for sound's sweet sake — that is what they aim at and achieve. Unbelievably clever, believe me. Their gods, if gods they have, are not Beethoven, Brahms and Wagner. Supercilious eyebrows and distended nostrils greet the songs of

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Schubert and Hugo Wolf. The past is nothing, for has it not passed? It is the moment that counts, the heartless, clever moment of bright fireworks and big balloons.

As an onlooker at the game of music as it is now being played in England, I am amused by the growing fashion indulged in by composers of criticising — or, rather, “appreciating” — each other’s works. It is a bad, indeed a stupid, practice. Ten or fifteen years ago, when the young British composer was ignored, or when heard disliked, there was ample excuse for Mr Josef Holbrooke filling the columns of the musical journals with his lively and invigorating articles. But the need for that sort of thing is now gone; indeed we hear far too much about the young composer. Not long ago London was a-chatter with the great and gorgeous news that Lord Berners had “done it again”; that Mr Peter Warlock was, or was not (as the case might be), becoming more and more like Mr Peter Warlock; that Mr Eugene Goossens was engaged upon a work as unusual and (perhaps) as unnecessary as Mr Wyndham Lewis’s latest novel; that Mr John Ireland, in a remote part of Chelsea (or was it Storrington?), was setting to music all the drawings of Aubrey Beardsley. I have little doubt that this sort of gossip is very interesting to the gentlemen concerned; to the general public, however, it does not appeal. Me it leaves unexcited.

Recently Mr Eugene Goossens published an article on the music of Lord Berners. The article was very badly written; but after I had read it four or five times this spectacle emerged from the long and windy sentences: I saw an iconoclastic giant, Lord Berners by name, hacking and hewing and blasting his way “over the shattered relics of nauseating mediocrity.”

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Cheered on by his disciples, this "uncompromisingly modern," this "brutally modern" giant strode bravely through the "storm of controversy" that blew about his ears, touching as he went the "whole gamut of human emotions." Then, the storm having died down, he stepped forth — a conqueror.

But I have seen this giant; at least I have heard and read and played his music. And it is not a giant: it is a man: a rather small and certainly an impertinent man. (I am writing of Lord Berners as a composer, of course.) And the great bludgeon with which he hacked his way "over the shattered relics," etc., was not a bludgeon at all, but a child's toy hammer. Moreover, there has never been "quite a storm of controversy" about him: all that happened was that Mr Ernest Newman publicly ragged him and that in reply Lord Berners worked himself into a pet.

Now what service does Mr Eugene Goossens suppose he is rendering Lord Berners, the musical public or his art by writing such undeniable flapdoodle? Filling his article to the brim with sentences that no self-respecting writer would employ, he says: "It is unfortunately too true that the path of the musical pioneer in this country to-day is beset with difficulties, one of the most formidable being the apathy with which a certain section of the so-called musical public regards any effort to open up new vistas in musical art." Observe: "in this [*sic*] country to-day [*sic*]." Why, if ever there was a time when the pioneer in musical art was greeted with wild shouts of welcome, that time is now. Quite recently half-a-dozen reputations have been made by eccentricity alone. With a little immoral courage, it is easy to be eccentric, and notoriety follows eccentricity as surely as sycophants follow a millionaire.

Lord Berners, it must be admitted, has original talent; he is something very much more than a mountebank; but he is not a man of great genius touching "the whole gamut of human emotion." By over-statement and exaggeration Mr Goossens brings ridicule both on himself and on the object of his adoration.

It is just because the pioneer in the art of music is sure of a welcome both now and in this country that we have so many pioneers, for this pioneering stunt is one of the easiest jobs in the world. All of us, indeed, could become pioneers if we wanted to. All one has to do is to print one's lucubrations or impertinences in red ink *à la* Erik Satie, or without bar-lines *à la* Ernest Austin, or from right to left *à la* Marcel Xystobam, or (best of all) in tonic sol-fa notation. When I issue my own works, each alternate bar will be printed upside down, but I am inclined to believe that in these days the easiest method of earning a reputation as a composer is to print no music at all. Perhaps, after all, I shall send my manuscripts to Coutts's and have them locked up in an iron safe in the cellar.

Let us, if possible, rid our minds of cant; what is still more important, let us acquire a little artistic dignity. The horrible spectacle of half the "neglected" composers of England writing letters and articles in the public Press about the other half is becoming a daily nuisance. If Smith's music does not sell, he writes an article on the music of Jones and belabours the stupid public for not appreciating modernism; Jones, in his turn, "discovers" Robinson and booms him; in the course of time Robinson hears of Smith; and the vicious circle is complete. Hysterical complaint and grouching invective do not help matters in the least: they are merely silly.

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Now let us see what this "convention-loving" public is like. According to Mr Eugene Goossens, it is "born in the rut of convention, nurtured on the stale milk of tradition" and "content mostly to follow the dictates of those whose policy is often anti-progressive." Well, this I admit describes fairly accurately a certain vastly unimportant section of the music-loving people, but Mr Goossens should remember that, cleverness being a merely relative term, we should have no astoundingly brilliant people like himself if we had no fools — that is to say, if we were all clever, none of us would be clever. We must have a dull background of stupid people in order that shining lights like Lord Berners may stand out in greater relief. To drive the point home once more: if we were all shining lights, there would be no shining light. So these male and female drinkers of "stale milk" have their uses after all. They may not fight frantically with each other in order to secure the last remaining copy of dear Gerald Tyrwhitt's "diverting set" of *Valses Bourgeoises*; but at least they do serve as useful, if "shattered, relics of nauseating mediocrity" through which that astonishing "hot-gospeller of modernism" may "hack, hew and blast" his glorious way. . . . What a dust of strong words meaning nothing! What an unthinking contradiction! If, indeed, the indifferent public consists merely of "shattered relics," why this spleen? Besides, is it right, is it kind? — nay, is it *seemly* for Mr Eugene Goossens to kick his multitudinous enemy when he is down?

What it all comes to is this: because the musical public has not *en masse* taken Lord Berners to its arms, it is a stupid public. Now a man who, according to Mr Goossens, delights in delivering "rude shocks" to

"delicate susceptibilities" cannot expect to be embraced. We may feel amused or we may feel angry, but we do not take him to our arms, nor do we ardently desire to increase his royalty account by a single sixpence. We recognise that here we have a young colt amusing himself in the manner of all young things by kicking over the traces . . . and we watch his amusing antics for a few moments; then pass on. Lord Berners is a diversion and nothing more. He has his place in the scheme of things, but it is a very small place. Moreover, we recognise that he is behaving in the conventional manner of the young and clever — like Mr T. S. Eliot in the art of poetry, and Mr Wyndham Lewis in the art of painting. It is they, after all, who are born in the rut of convention, for they obey all convention's laws. It is they who are "anti-progressive," for they have not yet, if I may say so, started.

But the man in the street, even the man in the back street, is not quite such a simpleton as our strident young composers are apt to imagine. To use a word that Mr Goossens, with his flowery English, would never employ, he has been "had" before. He wants something for his half-crown. He would rather save up his half-crowns and spend eight of them on Mr Rutland Boughton's *The Immortal Hour*, which is worth all that Lord Berners has written or is likely to write. No, the public is no fool. It may be slow and plodding, but given time it can recognise genius as surely as the next man. Many of us forget that most of our great composers secured a comparatively large public of quite ordinary people long before they were recognised and accepted by their fellow-musicians. Chopin was playing his music to Parisian audiences when the powerful Moscheles and the narrow, hot-brained

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Mendelssohn were sneering at him and holding up delicate hands of horror; Wagner had ten thousand disciples, mostly men in the street, when Brahms and Joachim and a score of other musical aristocrats were against him; and there were many Hugo Wolf societies when Hans Richter, to his eternal shame, publicly insulted him. The history of music, indeed, is full of examples of men of genius being banned and reviled by their powerful contemporaries. But, of course, any creative artist worth his salt does not write music and poetry, chisel pieces of sculpture or paint pictures for his fellow-artists. He pours out his soul for the world. If the world does not understand him, he does not — if he has an atom of dignity or pride — turn on that world and revile it, though he may very well curse fate and the scheme of things that is all awry. But if Mr Goossens had his own way he would chop off the heads of all people who do not like the music of Lord Berners. The unappreciated composer, of course, is always right and the public always wrong. Then why compose for the public? But, seemingly, Lord Berners does not, or else why the *Valses Bourgeoises*? You can't flout your public and take its money at one and the same time; and you must expect a *tu quoque* from those whom you call a host of fools.

No; the public in the end is *always* right, and the artist, more often than not, is wrong. And this, after all, is only what one might expect; for the artist is full of prejudices, thoroughly absorbed in his own personality and incapable of understanding anything that stands outside his own narrow sympathies. Have we not all recently enjoyed the self-revealing criticism of Florent Schmitt of Elgar's First Symphony?

Let me, as Mr Goossens might say, *cull* a last gem

from his article: "The psychology of hate and laughter is indeed graphically portrayed, and the deep emotion of the third of the series, 'A Sigh,' is equally remarkable in its treatment [of what?] . . . The temptation is great to dissert further on these pieces. . . . 'Poisson d'Or,' *an interesting study in the psychology of a captive gold-fish.*" The italics are not Mr Goossens', but I feel somehow that they ought to be.

Mr Arthur Bliss is generally regarded as quite the cleverest of the younger composers. His chief desire, I imagine, is to cut a figure. He certainly cuts one. One hears of him travelling in Bavaria — or is it in Bulgaria? He attends public dinners and makes aggressive speeches. He is very much "in."

"A page of Mr Bliss's
Is worth a hundred kisses.
Even a single bar
Goes much too far."

That is what a lady wrote on the back of a menu card and pushed across the table to me. A few minutes later Mr Bliss rose to his feet, walked behind his chair, pushed it against the table, placed his hands firmly on the chair's back, drew himself up nobly, and "delivered" a speech. . . . Mr Bliss may be many things, but he is not an after-dinner speaker. He lacks — what does he lack? A certain poise? Urbanity?

"Mr Bliss is never for very long urbane
Because people might judge him suburbane."

To him the most serious moment of a dinner is when the chairman says: "Mr Bliss." It is also the most serious moment for other people. One cowers. Or

one fingers one's glass. With an air of almost concealed vindictiveness, he tells of the manners and customs of some foreign folk who, it would seem, manage all these things better than we do: "these things" are music, social intercourse, what-not. His voice, tinged with undeniable aristocracy, goes interminably on. Soon he will get to his point, we say. Soon. Soon. What is his point? Lo! he has sat down. What has he been saying? Does anyone know? Anything *a propos*?

Madame Lily Henkel introduced us: no, she "presented" me.

"I've just been reading your jolly *Set Down in Malice*," he said.

"Yes?"

"And to-day I got your *Lover at Forty* from the library."

"You won't like it."

"No?"

"No. Nobody does."

"Not you yourself?"

"I think it vastly clever, of course. But I can't read it. Most unpleasant. So like life, you know."

"Life unpleasant?"

"Yes. . . . You live in London?"

"Yes."

"I'm in the country. Miles and miles away from Dorking. So we're not likely to meet often."

"I have a two-seater."

"Do you ever come Dorkingwards?"

"Frequently."

So I wrote down my address.

"I really will come, you know," he assured me.

Strange, wasn't it? that when I heard those words I knew he wouldn't. He didn't.

William Wallace is the most versatile man I have met, and quite the frankest. He is a doctor of medicine; a really learned musician and a composer of fine quality and distinctiveness; a poet also — vigorous, tender and imaginative; an artist with his brush, and an original designer; a man of action and a man of dreams; a thinker, also, who in more than one book has made solid contributions to the æsthetics and philosophy of music. Those who possess his *Freebooter Songs* — a work that has won wide admiration for a quarter of a century and will live a generation or two longer — know him in the three capacities of designer, poet and composer.

Too variously gifted? Well. Perhaps you mean too variously gifted for enduring fame? It may be so. Nevertheless he has had a finely stimulating influence on music; everything he has done has been for music's good, for the furtherance of ideals that have known no compromise. He is both honest and fearless — qualities to which our musical life is unaccustomed. He knows nothing of evasion, double-dealing. Moreover, when he meets evasion in others, he exposes it ruthlessly. Humbugs shun him; the pretentious tremble at his approach. Though William Wallace is far from quarrelsome, he is never afraid of a quarrel, and more than one highly placed musician has felt the lash of his righteous tongue.

When he called to see me some two or three years ago, he was writing a book on the art of the conductor, and he was good enough to tell me much about this branch of the art, the mysteries of which are known only to the few. Wallace knows everything about the technical side of conducting. He has studied it for more than thirty years, from both the theoretical and practical

points of view; he has discussed it with all our great conductors during the last three decades; he has accumulated a vast amount of notes; and he has theories of his own. I hope some day he will finish the book; it may not have a large public, but it will be of immense service to the few.

He is free from shyness: from the very outset he talks to you in the direct manner of one man to another. He is downright. What opinions he has are held firmly and expressed with conviction. There is in him no attempt at concealment: the man himself is revealed in his voice, his strong face, his gestures. The half-hour I spent with him was both invigorating and inspiring; he gave me more to absorb than my intellect could digest, but I remember well all he told me of muscular memory — information which, no doubt, I shall use in my forthcoming book on Memorising Music.

There is quite a vogue for Mr Martin Shaw's charming songs. If they do not possess true imagination, they have abundant fancy, and in both him and his work there is a clear note of sincerity that one would be glad to find in the more ambitious compositions of his younger colleagues.

When he played and sang a number of his songs for me, he was much interested in some movement, or guild, or federation, or conspiracy which, if I remember rightly, had for its chief purpose the organising of rejoicings of the people at ceremonies, anniversaries, and so on. Vast choirs were to sing lustily in Hyde Park; country dances were to be arranged in the centre of London; Albert Hall was to be filled with glad faces; folk-songs were to be taught to children who, it seemed, would sing them shrilly in our inclement weather.

"But," I objected, "all these movements are so artificial. Imagine a thousand children being taught to be happy and sing rejoicingly! And maypoles, Shaw! Think of maypoles: how *can* sophisticated people like you and G. K. Chesterton dance round maypoles? All that sort of thing is so dreadfully dead."

"Precisely. It is for that very reason we wish to revive them."

"I see. Intellectuals dabbling in the innocent sports of yokels. Sophistication sophisticating the natural. But, surely, if people want to dance on the village green, they will dance on the village green. But they don't want to. How can they, with beer at eight-pence a pint?—and the very lecs of booze at that? To try to revive Merrie England in these days is, I admit, heroic; but it is also humorous. At this very moment at least a hundred thousand people are jazzing away in London secure from sunlight. Hot rooms, lit by hard electric light, are much more attractive to us of this hour than the daisied field scented with may and lilac."

I said much more to the same purpose while Shaw gazed upon me mildly and not, I think, without amusement. When I had finished I could see I had made no impression upon this stout member of the Guild for the Resuscitation of Natural Pleasure and Rejoicing in Song (Folk) and Dance (Country). . . . They did, I think, meet in Hyde Park. But where are they now? We are as likely to see them again, I imagine, as we are to behold the much-advertised memoirs of Mr Lloyd George — which is not *very* likely.

I can think of few figures more tragic than that of a composer who, feeling within himself a world of thought

and emotion waiting to be expressed, is able by reason of some unanalysed complex, to release only a tithe of that thought and emotion. All the work of John Ireland seems to me to bear the imprint of a reserved, a difficult and a self-distrusting psychology. It has come to birth only after great labour and pain. There is in it a beauty that is only half revealed, even only half guessed at. It is music that is spiritually shy. Over it is an immense reserve, a reserve that makes even the style a little crabbed and forbidding.

Ireland himself is both reserved and distrustful of himself.

"I shall never repeat the success of my Violin Sonata," he told me.

"Why not? You are young enough to write fifty more works as good — and better."

"One doesn't repeat a success. You must have noticed that. No man is successful twice."

I gave him a quick look of surprise.

"I have never noticed it," I said. "Quite the contrary. Most artists who make any mark at all go on from one success to another."

"No," he said, as though he had made up his mind and would brook no contradiction; "it never happens. One success, and after that a series of half successes."

"Well, if you tell yourself that. . . . The imagination rules the will, you know."

"Does it?" he asked indifferently.

He played me much music of his own. He plays well, but his interpretations, I thought, were full of inhibitions. Simply he could not *give* himself. The soul of him was withheld. His playing was a continual struggle. . . . "How much can I squeeze *through*?" I fancied him asking himself; "how much can I make

him hear?" . . . I fancied for a moment that perhaps he felt my personality to be out of tune with his own, and for that reason he was unable to release himself; but when he continued playing me composition after composition, I knew that could not be so. What repression, what obscure complex, was inhibiting his powers? I do not know.

It was Granville Bantock who, opening a door in the Midland Institute, Birmingham, revealed to me a bearded, long-haired, thin but well-made man who interrupted his reading to fasten upon us kind and inquiring eyes.

"I want you to meet Gerald Cumberland, Boughton," said Bantock.

I sat down by Rutland Boughton's side, and almost at once we were deep in a serious discussion. Bantock, seeing that we were happy together, left us. From the very beginning I felt no reserve with Boughton, and before ten minutes had passed I knew we were to be firm friends.

In those days — I am writing of the year 1908 or thereabouts — Boughton was under the domination of an ideal of asceticism. He denied himself everything — meat, tobacco, alcohol, all pleasures of the senses. So thorough had he been in his self-torture that it was obvious to me he was endangering his health: his cheeks were white and sunken, his eyes glittered with unnatural brightness. I must, I think, have caught him on the rebound of this, his latest, enthusiasm, for when I began preaching to him a gospel in which I now only half believe — that every artist can attain full development only by continually bathing himself in the full waters of life — he listened eagerly, as though in my voice he heard the echo of his own heart.

When next I saw him, a few months later, it was in his own family circle with his charming children. He was now a different man: a singing, happy man. His asceticism had been thrown away and was now forgotten. I shall always remember the couple of days I spent with him, for it was then I began to realise that I was in communion with a spirit as idealistic and a nature as open as one may hope to meet. . . . If you wish to picture Boughton, you must think of a man full of untiring energy, a man in whose life are not many days in which there does not burn the flame of enthusiasm. He was made by nature for work, for inciting others to work. You cannot be with him without catching fire. I have seen him at many kinds of work. I have washed dishes with him; I have seen him rehearsing orchestra and choir; I have sat and listened to him teaching singers; I have heard him lecture; I have watched him busy with the work of organisation; I have heard him in argument, and listened to him playing Beethoven; and into each of these occupations he has thrown himself with an energy that was almost self-destructive. Best of all, I have watched him tending children and playing with them, a child among children.

During my first visit to him his ambitious choral and orchestral work, *Midnight*, was given at a Birmingham Festival. To me it was a revelation of a genius, original, individual, and "serious." But it was not a success, save with the chorus and with a few people who were already *en rapport* with Boughton's ecstatic spirit. But Boughton was not discouraged; or, if he was, he concealed his discouragement. Indeed I have never seen him discouraged, though I have been with him in times of great and choking adversity. But he is a

splendid fighter; when stricken by fate, or by the effect of his own unwise acts, he rises to his feet in an instant, ready for the next round. He has absolute confidence in his powers; fortunate for him this is so, or else long ago would he have succumbed to adverse circumstance.

Later on I met him in Derbyshire, then at my own home in Manchester, where he came after an abortive visit to Berlin. Then, when I removed to London, he settled within a stone's-throw of my flat. I saw much of him from time to time. But with shame I say that for some time I lost a good deal of my sympathy for him. I connected him with fads: I regarded him as a crank. This feeling was especially strong upon me when, very early one morning, he came to me with his Glastonbury scheme. He told me he was going to move to Glastonbury and found a theatre that, in some respects, was to be like the Wagner theatre at Bayreuth. When I pressed him to tell me why, of all possible places, he had chosen Glastonbury for his experiment — a town placed in a thinly populated district, difficult of approach, and presumably without any musical material to form a nucleus for his work — he was at first silent, but at length unfolded what was to me an impossible story. I do not propose to set it all down here; I will merely say that it included dream-clairvoyance, the finding of the Holy Grail in Italy, the bringing of the Holy Grail to Glastonbury, the concealment of it in a well. Boughton added that Joseph of Arimathea had visited Glastonbury, upon which, I was assured, the Arthurian legends centred. . . . All this meant less than nothing to me, and I told him so. To him, however, at that mystical period of his development, it meant a great deal, and I could see that my

disbelief in the finding of the Holy Grail wounded him.

So Boughton went to Glastonbury full of visionary ideas. But it is an essential part of his psychology that he combines with his inexhaustible mysticism a great gift for the affairs of life, and very soon he had begun to place his work on a practical basis. He made many friends and a few enemies. Pupils came to him from all parts of the country. At his school there were taught solo and choral singing, acting, dancing, declamation, scene-painting, instrumental music, and so on. Ardent men gathered round him. Bernard Shaw, Gilbert Murray, Sir Thomas Beecham, Frederic Austin and many others gave their help unstintingly, visiting him in Glastonbury and testifying by their presence there, and by the work they did for him, their belief in him and his music. But during all this busy, inspired time Boughton was hampered by two disabilities — the scarcity of money, and the lack of a suitable building for his performances. I do not know how he contrived to accomplish as much as he did, but I am very sure that of all the hard workers in Glastonbury he was the hardest.

During this period he composed a great deal. *The Immortal Hour*, which, as I write, nears its two hundredth consecutive performance in London, dates, I think, from this time. Those who have heard this penetratingly beautiful work — the adjective “great” scarcely fits it, though that admission detracts nothing from the opera’s vitality and lasting beauty — need no assurance from me that the man who composed it is among the finest spirits of our generation.

The war came, and with it a temporary cessation of work at Glastonbury, but with the Armistice the fight for artistic ideals began again. . . . It was not until

two years ago that I was able to visit Boughton at his school. I found him in difficulties: the enthusiasm of some of his helpers had waned: the times were adverse: there was no prospect of an adequate public performance of any of his operas. But there was no ebbing of his own enthusiasm. I myself was deeply afflicted at that time, but Boughton's personality, his work and the atmosphere of music in which we lived soon brought healing. . . . It needs an abler pen than mine to describe the charm, the happiness and the fellowship that filled his home. During the long winter evenings half-a-dozen of us would sit round the fire and sing catches, glees, part-songs. During the day there was work in plenty.

It may seem to the reader that I have tried to place Boughton before him as a perfect being. But Boughton is not perfect. His greatest faults are impulsiveness, a too reckless generosity both of deed and idea, and a not too wise judgment in his estimates of his fellows. He will trust the unworthy and look with suspicion on the worthy. His temper is far from even. Once or twice I have seen him blaze up in unaccountable anger; I admit, however, that his anger is short-lived and always openly regretted. He is intolerant; but that is no fault, for he is intolerant of intolerable things. He has no belief in half measures, in compromise. He is a faithful hater: no man could love his art and his fellows so devotedly as he if he had not a fine gift for hatred of humbug, cruelty, and all the pretentiousness that, more than the indifference of the ignorant, suffocates so much of artistic endeavour.

Dr Ethel Smyth's Autobiography is quite the most remarkable piece of prose written by a composer. I

do not forget the Autobiography of Hector Berlioz — that wonderful amalgam of spiritual truth and factual falsehood. Dr Smyth's two volumes reveal a nature of extraordinary intellectual richness and emotional power — qualities we find in her music. They have, also, abundant humour. . . . In reading a book, many of us half consciously build up some sort of image of that book's author; we take hints here, confessions there, mannerisms from a third place, and construct from them a fabulous creature who, more often than not, is grotesquely unlike the actual person.

But I was fortunate in my "construction" of Dr Smyth from her book: the reality confirmed what I had already conjectured. Our meeting, however, was only of the most casual. Miss Christine Walshe it was who introduced us at the close of a performance of Rutland Boughton's *The Immortal Hour* at the Old Vic. Dr Smyth has a firm handshake, a direct regard, a self-possessed manner, a somewhat eager way of talking, real geniality, much common sense. . . . But to catalogue a person's characteristics is to give but a distorted impression. One senses something invisible in people, and in Dr Smyth I was aware of courage and high-mindedness combined with a sensitiveness steeled against the disappointment and rude shocks of life. . . . A happy woman? By nature, no. But she has made herself happy by a continuous effort of will, by deciding in youth what she wanted out of life and by keeping her object continually in view. Without her pure spring of humour her life might very well have been tragic. She has touched tragedy, been in close contact with it; but it has marred nothing of her splendid and audacious personality.

CHAPTER IV

ON EARNING A LIVING

THOSE unsophisticated people who regard writers of books as rather romantic creatures would, I think, be surprised to learn that authors are rarely romantic, for the simple reason that they cannot afford to be. "Afford" is a *mot juste*: please give it its monetary implication. Romance, or what is commonly understood by that term, is difficult to achieve without cash. One's soul may be most piercingly romantic without investments or banking account, but it rarely is so; and, in any case, one cannot make romantic gestures without pounds and shillings. How many thousands of infatuated couples there are who, at this very moment, would be starting off — guiltily, but oh! so happily — to the Riviera (I write in early February) if only they had even a few hundred pounds. Lack of means is a wonderful preventive of open and scandal-bringing immorality.

But, as I was saying, writers of books earn but little money. There are, of course, a handful of — say fifty — exceptions. Arnold Bennett, for example, never has to beg his crust, nor have Sir Hall Caine, John Galsworthy, George Moore, H. G. Wells, Elinor Glyn, Marie Corelli, Stephen McKenna and Gilbert Frankau. On the other hand, there are many very distinguished writers whose income is smaller than that of a resourceful gardener. I do not complain that this is so: I merely state the fact. If Henry James had not

enjoyed what is so discreetly called "private means," two disastrous courses would have been open to him: either he would have been compelled to adapt his style to the taste of the masses (an incredible supposition!), or he would have been forced to spend the greater part of his energy in scrapping for a living. Mr D. H. Lawrence, whose genius amazes and excites two continents, can earn but a very moderate income, and fine and distinguished minds, like those of W. B. Yeats, Edmund Gosse, George Russell ("Æ"), George Bourne, Ernest Newman and Arthur Symons, would suffer from a hundred irritations and annoyances if their needs had to be accommodated to the royalties earned by their books.

It was not until quite recently that I decided to make the writing of books my chief source of income. Other men, to all appearances less clever and less adaptable than I, contrived to live more or less comfortably by that means, and I was tired of the hurry and anxiety of Fleet Street, though I loved its genial camaraderie and the bright novelty of its daily life. I told myself that I was well equipped for the writing of books, for I had spent the first thirty-eight years of my life in a passionate (I do not exaggerate) study of my fellow-men, their prejudices and conventions, their manners and customs; I had something of what my friend, Grant Richards, calls the technique of life; I had travelled a little and met many bright and amusing persons; and I already knew a little about writing. About my writing I was indeed rather proud. I was dangerously versatile, having written leading articles for *The Daily Citizen* (uncompromisingly Labour) and *The Globe* (unmitigatedly Conservative); poems for *The English Review*, *The Academy*, *The Saturday Review*, *The New Witness*,

Chambers's Journal, and a dozen of the more reputable journals; "serious" articles for *The Contemporary Review*, *The Times*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Bookman*, and thirty or forty other monthlies and dailies; and at least a thousand book reviews for any paper that would print (and pay for) them; and (at a very low estimate) two thousand articles on music, religion, travel, politics, finance and a host of other subjects to papers so widely "different" as *The Spectator* and *Hearth and Home*, *The Manchester Guardian* and *M.A.P.*, *The Morning Post* and *Northern Finance*, *The Sphere* and *The Musical Times*, and *The Cornhill Magazine* and *The Sunday Chronicle*. . . . Perhaps, when correcting the proofs of this book, I shall delete the foregoing paragraph of exhibitionism. But perhaps I shall not. We shall see.

Never having had more than an occasional difficulty in getting my articles "accepted," I concluded that I should meet with the same experience in regard to any books I might write. Indeed I had already written three books and had found publishers to pay me for them: not large sums, it is true, but then two of those books had been written when I was little more than a boy, and though one of them went into a third edition, I was persuaded to sell it outright for the preposterously absurd sum of five pounds. To write a book is a comparatively easy matter, I was told by my friends, but to get it published is a horse of quite another colour; and as for getting any money out of all those Barabbases of publishers — that was a truly stupendous achievement. But, in the event, I did not find it so. I have lived in modest comfort on the books I have written (they are not many), and I found my publisher both charming and cheerful when he lost money on my book of poems.

But there came a day when I badly needed an extra

hundred pounds, and I wanted it at once. I had already drawn on my generous friend, Grant Richards, for a great deal more than I was entitled to receive, and shame (even authors have occasional qualms of shame) stood in the way of my going to him for further assistance. What should I do? I could have written half-a-dozen short stories, but unfortunately it takes me a fortnight to write a passable yarn, and when I do write one only a high-brow magazine like *The English Review* will look at it. Why not write a serial story? I asked myself. Occasionally I had read scraps of those weird *feuilletons* that adorn the back pages of our popular dailies, and I had said to myself: "But how easy! To write this sort of thing one has not even to think!" But on other occasions, when reading the classic dialogue of Berta Ruck and Ruby M. Ayres, I had reflected: "Could I really write this flapdoodle? Obviously, it isn't so easy as it looks, or else everybody would be doing it. To write poppycock one must have a poppycock mind. Well, perhaps I have!"

As I reflected on this serious matter of the hundred pounds and the possibility of my having a poppycock mind, there came to me a sentence from a letter that R. D. Blackmore had written to Sir Hall Caine (then merely Mr) more than thirty years ago. That sentence was: "Have you ever tried Tillotsons of Bolton?" I don't think Hall Caine had ever tried Tillotsons of Bolton, but then and there I made a resolve that I would do so at once. Pacing by the side of a bed of crocuses that sunny morning in early March, I invented and worked out a plot about a cypress chest, an Egyptologist, an embalmed woman, an explorer, a craven valet, Scotland Yard, and so on. An hour later I telephoned to town and asked a typewriter firm to

send me down a typist by ten o'clock the following morning. Never before had I dictated anything save my letters, but I told myself that a machine-made story would not suffer by being written by a machine. Besides, I intended to "create" at least four thousand words a day, and to write them down with my own hand seemed a task altogether too Herculean. (My usual allowance was five hundred, upon which it was my custom to spend the four morning hours.)

Next morning my typist arrived. Her name was Miss Brookes. She had, I am convinced, expected to find someone quite different, and I am sure she was a beginner. She (or was it I?) was being tried on the dog. I was nervous. She also.

"Yes, straight on to the machine," I said; "it saves time. And one carbon copy, please, Miss Brookes. Ready? Good.

"Chapter I. — The curtain was down full-stop the woman raised her dark blue comma — um — got that? — the woman raised her dark blue comma heavy cloak and comma bending forward comma peered into the stalls comma and recognised Sir Henry semi-colon he comma as usual comma was accompanied by his daughter full-stop par quotes I am tired comma tired comma quotes she said full-stop par did her husband guess query par quotes are you query quotes he said full-stop."

Miss Brookes, tragically unaccustomed to life lived as rapidly as this, lost her head.

"Excuse me, I'm so sorry," she said, "but perhaps, if you left out the punctuation — you see, there's such a lot —"

"Punctuation, Miss Brookes, is the soul of style. It

[The matter beginning with the third paragraph on this page and ending at the words "She had broken my thread" on page 68 is here reprinted by kind permission of the Proprietors of *Punch*.]

cannot possibly be omitted. Even the sense depends upon punctuation."

"Yes, Mr Cumberland. Quite. What I meant was — well, if you left the commas and things to me I should be able to understand you better."

"No. I'm sorry — very sorry. Every author has his own method. W. E. Henley, for example, worked magic with the colon. Laurence Sterne's parentheses were wonderful. I flatter myself on my quick, sudden paragraphs. Where was I?"

"Are you query quotes he said full-stop," she read out resignedly.

"Par quotes yes comma very comma quotes she replied semi-colon quotes I think I prefer Ibsen full-stop quotes — um — par she sighed full-stop par quotes so do I quotes comma he agreed full-stop par the door of their box opened full-stop standing there was Sir Henry Vereker full-stop."

"But ——"

"Please don't interrupt, Miss Brookes. I've got the thing well started now; I don't wish the thread to be broken. Par quotes oh exclamation mark Sir Henry dash is it you query quotes par quotes yes comma it is I full-stop quotes — um — par her eyes swooped into his par — um — par quotes oh comma quotes she said comma quotes Sir Henry ——"

"But, really, Mr Cumberland, I — you — we can't go on like this. I'm afraid I've — you see, it's the way you dictate. I feel, I *know* that it's not right. My typing, I mean."

She gazed, at first apprehensively and then very mournfully, at the half-covered sheet before her. Its appearance was revoltingly unusual.

"What is the difficulty, Miss Brookes?" I inquired.

"Well, I've got 'Sir Henry Dash.' You didn't mean that, of course; I see now. And then again I've got 'It is I umpar. Her eyes swooped into his parumpar.' I'm dreadfully sorry. It makes such frightful nonsense, doesn't it? But sometimes you say an unexpected 'um' and down it goes before I realise that it isn't part of the story."

"I see. But you'll get used to that. You'll soon learn to separate the essential from the non-essential. A page or two more, Miss Brookes, and then you'll swim along — positively swim along."

"Shall I?"

"I feel sure of it. Very well, then. Now we can carry on. Where had I got? Oh yes — oh comma quotes she said comma quotes — um — no, not 'um' — Sir Henry dash you — not dash *you*, of course, Miss Brookes; just Sir Henry, then a dash, you understand, Miss Brookes? — you are quite a stranger full-stop I hardly expected you to come this evening full-stop."

For a moment I ruminated; then —

"It never entered my head that I should see you here this evening," I corrected slowly.

Miss Brookes rose.

"Oh, I *beg* your pardon. I didn't realise you were speaking to me, Mr Cumberland. I'm sorry. But I understand now. As a matter of fact I've been feeling for some minutes that I had perhaps mistaken the time and, I dare say, the house."

I let her go. I was glad to let her go. She had broken my thread.

"So," said I, lighting my pipe, which, in my excitement, I had forgotten, "I must write it all down myself."

I began again, and soon I was floating on a sea of

words. By bed-time I had written a chapter of four thousand three hundred and fifty words (I had been told that was the requisite length) and had sketched out a full synopsis of my heart-rending, hair-raising and flesh-creeping story. I sent it to the magic "Tillotsons of Bolton," not knowing if that firm still survived. It did. In two or three days they sent me an offer of a hundred pounds for the serial rights of my ghastly novel, and informed me that the film and book rights were my own property. Eleven days later I had completed the beastly thing and my cheque arrived just in time to save me from — well, inconvenience. I had written fifty-two thousand words in twelve days, thus beating Nat Gould at the little game of writing more quickly than one can possibly think.

Only three weeks ago there arrived for me a copy of the *Glasgow Bulletin*, an organ hitherto unknown to me. Having opened it, I saw the first instalment of my ghastly serial — *The Cypress Chest*. I read it. After doing so I became ill. I shall read no more. . . . Alas! I know it now. Most indubitably my mind has a tinge of poppycockism. (Reviewers please note.) Nevermore shall I write a serial. Sooner — far sooner — would I be dragged to the Court of Bankruptcy. To this day I do not know if "Tillotsons of Bolton" wrote in irony or in good faith when they told me the book rights of my story remained my property. Rather than see it on the bookstalls with my name on its cover, I would gladly die.

By the way, I remember G. H. Mair telling me years ago, as we drank cocktails in the Midland Hotel, Manchester, that Arnold Bennett regarded his own serial stories with perfect gravity — even *The Gates of Wrath*. But Arnold Bennett can afford to maintain

this attitude. Has he not written *The Old Wives' Tale* and *Hilda Lessways*? But a writer of infinitely smaller gifts is not allowed to cast off his garment of seriousness for even twelve days. Should he do so, then reviewers will call out "Pot-boiler!" to him even as youths in these days shout "Beaver!" to him who has foolishly grown a beard. I do not know why this should be so. It frequently happens that the more conscientiously an author writes, the less money he makes; if he devotes nine months of each year to the exercise of his highest faculties and three months to the making of a little necessary cash, I do not see why he should be reviled as though he were an unspeakable person of dark and evil life. Quite recently Mr Arnold Bennett told a bumptious reviewer that the reviewer had libelled him by calling *Lilian* a pot-boiler. No doubt Mr Bennett was right, but I was amazed that he should have allowed himself to be annoyed by the stinging of so small a gnat.

But though the ordinary author earns little enough by his books, other means of wage-earning are open to him. There are the daily papers, the weeklies and the monthlies. The weeklies pay in inverse ratio to their importance: the really intellectual organs, for example, give you the price of a couple of stalls for a hard day's work, and the frivolous weeklies do not turn a hair (how does one turn a hair?) at paying you six guineas for a couple of hours' trifling.

During 1920 and 1921 I wrote some fifty or sixty articles for a weekly paper of almost unexampled dignity and historical repute. I took the utmost pains over my work, because I enjoyed it, and because it is my habit to take pains. The cheques I received in

payment for my labour were so unbelievably small that, filled with curiosity, I went to the trouble of calculating how much I earned per hour. The amount was one shilling and ninepence halfpenny. I suspected my arithmetic until I had worked out the sum four times. "Well," thought I, "this is not the wage of an Italian waiter. I like the work, I feel honoured at being allowed to write for so important a journal, and I am flattered at having so many such distinguished colleagues. But can I afford to do it?" A few days later my editor wrote me a flattering letter in which, having "my dear'd" me, he said: "Your review of Quiller-Couch's *Literature and Life* is really very fine: +1 many times multiplied. 'That strain again — it comes o'er my soul,' etc. It is really eloquent. You should have gone into politics, which pay better than journalism." The letter was signed "Your grateful Editor."

I read this little document thrice, and as I folded it up I heard whispered into my ear: "My friend has delivered himself into my hands." In other words, I resolved to make a sturdy attempt to increase my rate of pay. Now I should explain that though I am as fond of money as the next man, I am so idiotically constituted that I find it enormously difficult to suggest to any employer of mine who is also my friend that he is not treating me as I desire him to in the matter of payment. Rather than strain the pleasant relations between myself and an editor whom I like, I will submit to the most Lilliputian of cheques. But on this occasion I screwed myself up to the sticking-point, and one morning during a friendly conversation I lifted a corner of the blanket that concealed my secret desire. My gaze cast shyly down, I spoke a few words. He

understood: I made sure of that. But, hating to cause him the distress of refusing me (if he wanted to refuse), I quickly changed the subject. "He will write to me," I reflected. He did. The next morning I received an invitation to dine with him at one — the most exclusive — of his clubs. But I was unable to accept for the evening he had chosen. A day or two later there came from him an invitation to lunch at another of his clubs. I went, trepidation in my heart. What will he offer me? I asked myself. Twice my present rate of pay? Well, he can scarcely offer me less. But whatever it is, I'll accept it. How I *do* wish it was all over!

Young neophyte of high-brow journalism, I have but one word of advice for thee: Beware of the *charmeur*. Trust him not: he's fooling thee.

My "grateful" editor (and I really do believe his gratitude was sincere and — well, reasonable) gave me food and drink and conversation. Most skilfully, for one all too short, delicious hour, was I flattered. I was fully aware of what was going on; I knew that these soft, engaging words were meant to thrill me into forgetfulness of so base a subject as money; but I felt no atom of resentment. My vanity, on that occasion, was my undoing. We rose from the table comfortably replete, and I remember that surging up from the inmost recesses of my soul was the thought: "Gerald Cumberland — what a wonderful fellow you are!" My host, I have no doubt, read that thought in my dancing eyes, and as we parted I felt that we were closer friends than ever. So gross a subject as pay had never, for one instant, been allowed to mar the intimacy of our intellectual conversation.

Did this little lunch, with its silence on a matter so

near to both our pockets, disturb our mutual regard? It did not. I continued working for my editor friend, and I continued to receive his monthly cheques that remained so consistently frugal. But for a circumstance over which neither he nor I had any control, I should be working for him still.

But if I have occasionally been paid less than I imagined I deserved, I have frequently been given much more than I imagined possible. The editor of an American magazine sent me, a short time ago, forty guineas for an article he had asked me to write. It was the work of less than a day. Again I did a little arithmetic. Forty guineas a day for three hundred and sixty-five days makes the astonishing annual income of £15,330. Such simple sums have helped to brighten the dark brown hours of most writers whose powers of earning money are not equal to those of Victoria Glyn and Elinor Cross. Then the Sunday papers and the frivolous journals that appear in the middle of the week have never offered me less than six guineas a thousand and on several occasions have increased the amount to ten guineas.

At this rate, you will say, I ought to make a more than respectable living. But I don't. Not every day am I in the mood to write a short article worth six guineas, and even if I were, I certainly should not be able to find a market for seven articles a week. In journalism one makes money easily enough, but there are not great sums to be made. And, to be candid, I never write an article unless I am asked to write it. A man whose chief occupation is the writing of books is wise to remove himself from the hurry and bustle and anxieties of Fleet Street. . . . So it comes about that in my fortieth year

I am, for the first time in my life, able to live where I want.

But where do I want to live? Where does any man want to live? He never knows. He goes to the heart of the country and for a few days takes a genuine pleasure in admiring the early violets and daffodils and primroses. He settles down to work, writes his five hundred or perhaps even his thousand words in the morning, walks in the afternoon, and in the evening . . . Well, what does he do in the evening? What *is* there to do in the country in the evening? Nothing, save to think and dream of London. So he sets his teeth and reads and plays the piano or patience. Now when a man of forty plays patience there is something sadly wrong. To play patience before the age of seventy is a gesture of desperation. . . . Yes, he dreams of London. There are the Degas sculptures: he must not miss them: they await him in London. There are the new Nevinsons: how stimulating they would be! There are the Wertheimer Sargents in the National Gallery; somehow or other he has not yet been able to take his easy pleasure with them — he has carelessly forgone the three hours' delight awaiting him in Trafalgar Square. And it is impossible to live without music. At this very minute they are giving the Bax Sinfonietta, and that faëry, tear-compelling music of Rutland Boughton's *Immortal Hour*, which he has heard only thrice, is filling the Regent Theatre. And the Café Royal: it still calls. And the people — the magical people who have so much to say! The lighted streets. The smell of petrol. The splendid, wonderfully controlled vulgarity of George Robey. . . . As he climbs upstairs to bed his heart aches. And in the night-time his dreams are full of Cockaigne.

It is next morning that the real struggle comes. His work does not "go." His style has lost its sap. He hates the novel he is writing. His hero is a prig, his heroine a stuffed doll. . . . For a day or two he fights his self-disgust, and fortifies himself with thoughts of Anthony Trollope and Arnold Bennett and other writers who never permitted and never permit the mood of the moment to inhibit their inspiration. But in the end he submits, and a morning comes when, rising, he sings, and, having breakfasted, he rolls to the station in an ancient cab. . . . By midday he is back again in Heaven: his Heaven the Cheshire Cheese.

And then, of course, all work ceases. London takes him and drives him. He is drawn here and pulled there. He gluts himself with music, with pictures, with talk. His mind is fastened on nothing save the great processional spectacle of Life as it passes before his eyes in a thousand aspects. . . . Then, tired, harried and confused, he dreams of the peace of the countryside, and when he returns thither the cherry-blossom whitens Easter-tide.

Where does he — do I — want to live? I wish I knew.

CHAPTER V

GEORGE ROBEY — HARRY TATE — SEYMOUR HICKS — C. B.
COCHRAN — ARTHUR BOURCHIER

MOST admirers of George Robey conceive him as a man almost bursting with high spirits, joviality and untiring energy. For you, reader, the fountain of his merriment never runs dry; during the advertised hours he will give you your half-guinea's worth of laughter, and more also; you will never catch him off colour even for five minutes.

But when not on the stage he can be (and sometimes is) a very different fellow. Even George can look wan with boredom and mutter faint damns as he assists his dresser to make him up. Nor are his damns always faint.

Soon after the Armistice there came a fine spring day that meant nothing to me. I was out of a job; at least I was writing a book; in any case, I had only a solitary half-crown. I remember standing disconsolately at the corner of Leicester Square and wondering vaguely what on earth I was to do for a living in this new and riotous world in which I found myself. I was desperate. I would have done almost anything for money: read a Harold Begbie novel, say, for five pounds: or even a book of poems by Jackie Squire. A newspaper boy at my elbow, addressing me, said: "There goes George." I looked up, and saw Robey gloomily reclining in a taxicab. "Where's he going?" I asked idly. "By six

o'clock he'll be fifty quid richer than he is now," said my new friend; "he's off to do a bit of work."

An inspiration came to me. "Fifty quid richer by six o'clock." . . . Well! . . . I darted across the road and presented myself at the artists' entrance. Handing my half-crown to the man in attendance, I received in exchange a sheet of note-paper. I wrote an earnest letter to Robey telling him I was a journalist and that I craved an interview. A good word, "crave," I said to myself as I wrote it. Would he see me? I waited ten minutes. Yes, he would. I climbed many stairs and was shown into . . .

Imagine Robey's dressing-room ten minutes before a show is due to start. A valet is in attendance. A horsey-looking man stares at me with almost indifferent but slightly hostile eyes. Robey, projecting thick arms from a flannel vest, turns on me with a scowl.

"Go away! Hop it! Clear out! Write any mortal thing you like about me. Say I slept all last night in a balloon over the lake in Battersea Park. Say I always eat raw cabbage for breakfast. Say that a week to-morrow I'm going redder than Lenin himself. Only, for heaven's sake, shimozzle! Can't you see I'm busy? I've got to earn my living, *I* have, and a damned living it is, too, while you can stroll about Piccadilly or Limehouse, or wherever it is you do stroll, and do nothing. Two shows a day! ME! 'Op it, I tell you. I'm fed to the teeth."

"Really? I may say anything? I may invent it all?"

"Nothing you can invent is likely to equal what I shall say if you're not behind that piece of wood in two ticks. Invent! Why, don't all you writing fellows invent everything?"

I sat down, took out a notebook and pencil, and smiled.

"Well, of all the —— Here, read this!" he exclaimed, and then threw a book at me.

I examined its cover and read: "My Purple Past, by George Robey."

"That'll keep you quiet a bit," he said, with a scowl. "Just read what I did in '97."

I opened the volume; all the leaves were blank.

"Joke?" I inquired.

He made a strange noise at the back of his throat.

"For God's sake, go; or, rather, will you kindly leave me, Mr Cumberland? . . . Well, tell whoever's foolish enough to read your stuff that I loathe having to earn a living, that I'm overworked, that it's not in the least funny being dam-funny, and that ——"

He was now outside in the corridor and, for a few seconds, I heard him communing angrily with himself. Then, suddenly, the door opened and in came his head.

"Take care," said he, "you're not here when I come back."

I did take care. . . . I retired to Charing Cross Station, sought a waiting-room, and began to write an article on my interview with George Robey. I made it light, bright and suitable for Sunday palates. . . . I am by nature an exceedingly slow writer, but Fleet Street has taught me the art of working against time. By half-past four I had written twelve hundred words, and a quarter of an hour later I was back in Robey's dressing-room. He was covered with perspiration, and my presence seemed too much for him.

"Oh, you're the blighter ——" he began.

"Yes," I interrupted. "Listen. I won't keep you three minutes."

I proceeded to read him my article. He listened attentively.

"Not bad," he commented when I had finished.

"Will you sign it?" I asked.

He eyed me with suspicion.

"Sign it? What for?"

"Well, you see, I want to sell it. Your signature will prove that I really have interviewed you."

He reached out his hand, took my MS., wrote his name upon it and handed the article back to me.

By half-past five I was closeted with the editor of a Sunday newspaper. He was a man of few words.

"Very busy," said he; "give you two minutes."

I thrust my article into his hand. He was about to place it on his desk for further consideration when his gaze fell on the opening sentence. He began to read. With an impassiveness that was not quite boredom he turned the leaves.

"Six guineas?" he queried.

"Eight," I answered. Then, as he hesitated, "I quite thought eight," I added.

"Seven," he said, swivelling his chair round so that I saw only his back.

"Very well," I agreed, "if I may have the cheque now."

He rang a bell. . . . In five minutes I was the richer by seven guineas.

Chance took me to George Robey's dressing-room a month or two later. Once more he showed me "My Purple Past."

"But," said I, leaving it unopened, "I've read it."

"Oh, you're the blighter that blighted me. Yes. I remember you. Of course. Well——"

All this happened four years and more ago. I

haven't seen him since except across the footlights. He looks better there, I sometimes think.

It was Tom Webster who took me to see Harry Tate, whom, not very late one evening, we found standing up against the bar in a club frequented by artists of the stage.

Tate is the quietest man I've ever met. We indulged, so to speak, in a little intellectual conversation — O. Henry (this was in the early days of O. Henry's popularity), Barry Pain, and a few other writers who have the reputation of being amusing.

We sipped whisky, and as we sipped I examined that clever, sensitive and rather shy face, trying to discover upon it traces of that grotesque and brain-shattering humour that I knew lay beneath.

But it was not until I had proved to him that I myself am a man of few reserves and — when in the presence of my superiors — of no "side" that he came gradually out of his shell. But at last he did come, and I saw that he possessed a sensitiveness so delicate that I could but wonder how he had contrived to eat his way, caterpillar-like, through the crust upon crust of indifference, ignorance, or sheer callousness that impede the music-hall artist who is only a beginner.

He is a man of wide reading, a man whom experience has made shrewd and perhaps a trifle suspicious, a man who has the power of attracting to himself the most diverse kinds of nature. Webster, who is only stirred to enthusiasm by the "right" kind of men — what Tommy would call a "white feller" — adored him, and I for my part felt the strong pull of a very human man.

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Debonair . . . that tired adjective, so often employed to describe Seymour Hicks, must be used once more. They used to say that George Alexander could make love more convincingly than all English actors. But he knew only the five-finger exercises of love-making, whilst Seymour Hicks interprets almost its entire music. He turns to love lightly, like the young man in the spring; makes of it a foaming fountain — a jewel — a flower; plays with it expertly, tossing it hither and thither dangerously; laughs at it — leers at it — fondles it — mocks it. But he could never make a Romeo, or a Paolo, or an Antony. The nearest he can get to tragedy — the nearest he *wants* to get to it — is the half-sob born of mingled tears and laughter. . . . Nevertheless, *some* lover!

Though he is fifty-one, most men of forty envy his youth. Real youth it is — smiling, buoyant, unconquerable. Like all men with a touch of genius, he has enormous vitality, his chief recreation being work. And in the face of failure — unmistakable, downright failure — he has the courage and the *insouciance* of a schoolboy.

Seymour Hicks off the stage proved so very much like Seymour Hicks on the stage that it was difficult for one to believe he was the same man. One rather expects an actor to act. Perhaps Hicks does act; perhaps he acted to me when, after the third or fourth performance of Macdonald Hastings' *A Certain Liveliness* — it was taken off a few nights later — I met him with C. B. Cochran. Cochran was glum. Hicks, on the other hand, smiled quizzically, with a look that said: "Fancy meeting you!"

I extolled the genius of the actor in language that, I felt, had enthusiasm without gush. He liked my

praise. Unaffectedly, nicely. "And the play?" he asked. "Brilliant!" said I. He nodded, taking off a fantastic garment. "Overflowing with wit!" I added. Again he nodded. "Wonderful plot!" I urged, getting warm. He considered this for a moment, showing a bare, muscular arm, and pursing his lips; for the third time he jerked his head an inch forward. "Ingenious, original, resourceful, full of ideas and satire and mockery!" I chanted, feeling that, at last, I had really got going. He made a gesture that suburban ladies call "inimitable," and one eyebrow leaped ceilingwards.

"Nevertheless, a failure!" pronounced Cochran heavily, staring at his boots.

Scymour Hicks grinned.

"Is it?" he asked. "Really? I'm having such a splendid time myself that I don't notice these things. I don't suppose I've made so many brilliant speeches in one night as I've made every night since this show began."

His dapper figure, his dapper face, his dapper clothes, and his rapid hands, so very much alive, gave me the impression of serene happiness and serene vitality.

"Of course it's a failure," said Cochran. "Bring all the Cabinet ministers to-morrow night and put 'em in the front row of the stalls; bring all the crowned heads of Europe and put 'em in the second row; bring Carpentier, Driscoll, Beckett, Wells, Horatio Bottomley, George Bernard Shaw, Charlie Chaplin, and all the other famous men of the world and put 'em in the third row; do all this and go on doing it every night and still the play'd be a failure. No — don't put 'em in the stalls. Let them act in the play — it would make no difference."

"And yet," said I, "the show's one of the cleverest ——"

"Of course it is!" interrupted Cochran. "That's why."

Seymour Hicks, who in the meantime had sat down in a little office near at hand, filled his mouth with lobster, and smiled.

"Eat!" said he; "it's jolly good."

"Well," said I very fatuously, "can I do anything to help?"

Cochran took his eyes from his boots and stared at me. "The Press!" he sighed. "The Press can do anything it wants. You get that chap, 'The Man in the Street,' of *The Evening Standard* to give us a column! But he won't. He doesn't like theatres. No, Cumberland, the show's doomed."

"Well, all I can say is," exclaimed Hicks, "it's a jolly nice kind of doom. I hope it'll last. This is the sort of show. I could play it to empty houses every night. I don't want an audience's laughing to encourage me; I can do all the laughing myself."

I left them half-an-hour later, reflecting on one of life's mysterious truths — that the man of business can never laugh at failure, whilst the artist often does. But then Seymour Hicks, debonair, confident and elastic-minded, lives in the excitement of the moment, whilst the impressario has to face the day of settlement.

Frank Harris had hallowed (or done the reverse of hallow) that particular seat in the octagon court of the Midland Hotel, Manchester, in which I found Arthur Bouchier sitting late one night a few Septembers ago.

I wanted to write a play; I have always wanted to write a play. It was here eight years earlier that

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Frank Harris had outlined for me three or four short stories and a modern three-act drama. Bouchier talked a good deal about Cosmo Hamilton, in whom at that moment (naturally enough) I was not in the least degree interested.

Mr Hamilton was writing plays for Mr Bouchier; I intended that the next play Mr Bouchier produced should be written by me. But I had no plot. (I never have.) He smiled a benignant, midnight smile as I revealed to him my intentions. "Very well, then," said he, hunching up his shoulders and staring hard at me. "What about this? In real life Mrs Bruffles institutes proceedings against her husband for the restitution of conjugal rights; but Mr Bruffles does not return. In my-your-our play he *does* return. See? Never been done before either in life or in art. So far, good. He returns from Egypt — Morocco — anywhere. Big man; bluff and hearty and — good. Never kissed anyone else.

"But the women, as women do, have been getting at her: saying things: hints — until, poor thing, she believes him to have been unfaithful. He comes back unexpectedly. House-party. *She* is there. Enters as though nothing had happened: nothing *has* happened so far as he knows. Carries on quite naturally. Sensation. Then someone tells him. More sensation. Bruffles plays up to the situation. Bruffles is unhappy, but . . ." The plot unrolled itself jerkily but with splendour. I watched Bouchier's eyebrows, and I noticed that the mere lifting of his hand made things happen. In the middle of the second act I thought it the most sensational, original, and money-getting plot I had ever heard. By the end of the third act I *knew* it was.

“Wonderful!” I exclaimed. “What invention! what daring! what resource! and you actually give me permission to use this splendid plot?”

“Why, yes!” answered Bouchier, smiling. “It is a little thing Cosmo Hamilton thought out the other day; we have decided not to use it.”

Yet a few months later Mr Bouchier wrote to ask me if I had yet written that play. I hadn’t.

CHAPTER VI

TOM WEBSTER

NOT very long ago Mr E. V. Lucas declared that Tom Webster was the luckiest thing that had happened to England since the war. But Webster "happened" some little time before 1914. He had tens of thousands of admirers in 1913, the year in which I was fortunate enough to meet him, for he was drawing cartoons for *The Daily Citizen*, and even in those days his work was "billed" throughout the kingdom.

I suppose it would be difficult to find two men more essentially different than Webster and myself, yet almost from the very first we became close friends. He attracted me before I knew his work: his gaiety attracted me — his liveliness, his wit, his eagerness, his extraordinary vitality. There was something merciless, deadly, in his wit when he came in contact with anyone who was foolish enough to be pretentious. I do not think that pretentiousness angered him; rather did it seem to awaken in him that holy joy which one may imagine comes to those who are swiftly transferred from earth to heaven.

Sometimes he sought the company of the solemn fool in order to prick the soaring bladder of his conceit. There was just a streak of the gamin in him; to half the world he assumed a thumb-to-nose attitude; to the other half he was serious, humble even, anxious to learn, greedy of experience.

Towards me — though I was nearly ten years his senior — he acted as a kind of guide to life: he showed me a side of London that I should never have known but for him, and as my life till then had been lived in a narrow groove, and as my knowledge of the human game was absurdly small, I was only too glad to fall in with Webster's wishes and go where he told me.

It was with him that I went to my first Derby. I have been to many race meetings since, but I know nothing of horses, and I understand the intricacies of betting less than I do the theory of relativity. But I soon learned from Webster that we had not come to Epsom to watch horses run, but to watch other people watching them. This information filled me with delight, and I have no doubt that all would have gone smoothly and well if we had not chanced upon the gorgeous and overwhelming Mr Wal Harpur. Mr Harpur was (I hope still is) a prosperous bookmaker in Birmingham, and an old friend of Webster's. He and I were introduced. . . . No, I can't describe him. He is the sort of man you meet in books. Balzac or O. Henry. A magnificent person who with a wave of his arm seemed to produce bottles of champagne out of space. Underlings poured out the cool, hissing stuff that creamed and mantled at the glass's brim. We drank, while Wal Harpur shouted the odds and did big business. Webster when working is very abstemious; when playing he can, like most good fellows, let himself go a little. I caught a glint of amusement in his eye when I was half-way through my second tumbler. (Mr Harpur had no use for wine-glasses.) . . . The hours that followed were delightful. Too delightful, perhaps, for

me. I felt, as Ralph Hodgson so wonderfully sings, that

“Reason has moons, but moons not hers
Lie mirror’d on her sea,
Confounding her astronomers,
But, O! delighting me.”

I remember vaguely that I was invited to dine with Mr Harpur at the Salisbury Hotel that evening, but Tom Webster had to go without me: one has always to pay dearly for champagne and a hot sun partaken of at noon. Often have I bitterly mourned my absence from that dinner. Just as the invalid Robert Louis Stevenson was drawn to dreams of risk and adventure, just because he *was* an invalid, so am I, the versifier and pianist, attracted by the rough and rude side of life. I like hearty men; the company of professional poets distresses me. . . . As I write I recall that Frank Harris used to be fond of quoting from Landor’s famous epigram the line about warming both hands before the fire of life. But that isn’t enough. One must strip naked and, if so the mood directs, step into the very midst of life’s flames. Our Georgian squirearchy of poets — Turner, Shanks and company — are much happier, however, prettifying life . . . and death. Strange, the theory that life is an experience to be written about rather than lived! Security first: a good income; powerful friends; a growing reputation; everything tremendously *comme il faut*, and fortified and buttressed against the unexpected shocks of our brief mortality: these things first, and then little poems in the yellow monthly and (perchance) the pea-green weekly; correct dinners with Edward Marsh where new poets are “tried”; a biennial anthology from The Poetry

Bookshop; and quiet but unconcealed log-rolling, week in, week out. . . . Shanks's Ruth to Squire's Naomi.

But what has all this to do with Tom Webster? Nothing whatever.

Webster took me to the National Sporting Club. I had never seen a professional fight, but my guide, wishing perhaps to observe the effect of burst lips and blood-emitting noses on one so highly æstheticised as myself, insisted that no man could regard himself as educated who knew nothing of the greatest of all games. So I went, and was fascinated. My companion, seeing that I neither paled nor trembled, gave all his attention to his work. Webster draws with amazing facility. I suppose that during the couple of hours I was with him he made at least fifty lightning sketches of the various boxers: sometimes an arm, then a bent, strained torso, then a complete figure lying prone, then an exciting confusion of legs and arms. The leaves of his notebook were turned over in silence. As he drew, his eyes were almost always on the object, and but rarely on the paper. Between the drawings he would talk, but I don't remember that he ever finished a single comprehensible sentence.

"It always seems to me, Gerald, that in the fifth round one or the other of the ——"

His eye caught something; he compressed his lips and his pencil danced about the paper. In half-a-minute he had finished, and a new leaf of his notebook was before him.

"You were saying?" I asked.

"Oh yes. You'll notice that nearly always in the fifth round — or perhaps the sixth —— Lord! Did you see that?"

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Again his pencil was busy, and I forgotten.

"He's beaten! Finished!" he exclaimed. "No. Yes. Look in the far corner, on the left, behind that bald-headed fellow ——"

I looked, but noticed nothing unusual. Webster was working furiously now, turning over page after page in the lightning way that — so it is said — Macaulay used to read a book. At length he darted me a glance.

"Good stuff, that," he said, grinning, but I didn't know whether he was referring to what he had seen in the ring or what he had drawn.

His cartoon, miraculously it seemed to me, appeared in next morning's paper; it was composed of these fifty hasty sketches in much the same manner as a jig-saw puzzle is put together by a careful adjustment of its fifty different pieces. But there was much more besides. Webster's memory is in his eyes. A great deal that he had been unable to put down on paper the previous night appeared in the finished cartoon. And his running commentary, printed in damning black letters, was crammed with malicious wit. . . . Malicious? Yes. Why not? When a great wit or satirist dies, it is the convention for everyone to declare that he had not an ounce of malice in his composition. Such a statement is nearly always a lie. Controlled and directed malice is a fine thing. To suffer fools or folly gladly is natural only to those who themselves are foolish.

It is indeed because Webster has a touch of sly malice in him that his work makes such an extraordinarily general appeal. All of us like to see the boaster, the pinnacled one, getting his deserts, if only because he so rarely does so. . . . But, of course,

Webster should have been born a literary cartoonist; his income would not have been so large (his salary is enormous), but he would have enjoyed himself more, for in the literary world there lies ready to hand a hundred times more material for satire than in the world of sport. Max Beerbohm does his delicate best, but his method is not adapted for these savage times when jealousy seethes even in liberated Hampstead, and Cornwall has become a hotbed of literary conspiracy.

Webster is as admirably malicious in his conversation as he is in his drawings and captions. He is a profound, an instinctive, psychologist. I place more reliance on his judgment of men than I do on that of any other man. He is not to be deceived. He demands of every man in the sporting world that he shall be a sportsman, and he makes the same demand on men outside the sporting world. How greatly our new literary gods would hate and fear him if he walked among them with his unsparing, innocent eyes! I feel that our contemporary literary history is incomplete until we possess cartoons from Tom Webster on the following subjects — Edmund Blunden receiving the Hawthornden Prize; Solomon Eagle reporting to J. C. Squire a change in the *personnel* of the staff of *The New Statesman*; H. G. Wells, rather mistaking his man, giving fatherly advice to James Joyce; Arnold Bennett anxiously explaining the real nature of his novels and plays to R. D. Blumenfeld; the editor of *The Saturday Westminster* agitatedly reading over the telephone to Rose Macaulay a new MS. poem by Walter de la Mare; St John Ervine gazing raptly at No. 10 Adelphi Terrace, and wondering how on earth Shaw does it. . . . But such subjects would only bore Webster. Perhaps I

should be happier if they bored me; unfortunately, they don't.

An unexpected side of Webster was revealed to me a week or two after the outbreak of the war. He disappeared for two or three days. I missed him, for everything was at sixes and sevens, and I was very much out of mood; I knew that five minutes of his company would make the world seem a little less unendurable than it then appeared. I remember climbing up on to the roof of *The Daily Citizen* office and watching the pleasant evening thicken into blackness. I returned to my work to find Webster in the little room I shared with Nicol Bain.

He had been to France and had walked along the coast from Calais towards Dieppe for a couple of days and half-a-night. He intended returning as soon as possible, only this time he wanted to strike inland and get somewhere near the firing line. Would I go with him?

"But how splendid!" I exclaimed.

But why it seemed "splendid" I could not have said; I only know that in those days a new experience drew me as a magnet draws steel.

I obtained a passport with but little trouble, and having bought a handsome belt with pockets, stuffed into it fifty sovereigns. In the meantime I had arranged for my wife to come with us, and had intimated to J. D. Stokes that the world of sport could survive his absence for a week or ten days. Intimation was enough for Stokes. He gave his nervous ghost of a cough and "I'll come," said he.

In Dieppe a few nights later we played a gross and childish modification of the game of billiards. In my memory the size of the table lingers as that of a pocket-

handkerchief. It was a game, I imagined, that only Frenchmen — delightful people! — could play with any seriousness. But no. My friends, taking off their coats, eyed the difficult surface of the cloth as a golf enthusiast surveys the course, and in heavy silence proceeded to make breaks that, it appeared, staggered even themselves. . . . I myself am a bridge player. Need I say that presently I sidled to the door and began to investigate the contents of the wine cellar?

Those autumn days were wonderful — mellow, quiet, drenched with golden sunlight. It was my third holiday that year. In the spring I had gone to Greece with F. N. Byron, whose charming volume of poems was to appear five years later; in the summer I had spent a week with Ivan Heald on the Thames and in Oxford; and now, with my wife and two of my friends, I was making my way towards the heart of France. We walked from dawn to dusk, but though the blue sky and golden sun were above us, we were not happy. We told each other that the war would be over by Christmas; nevertheless the grim earnestness of France — the set jaws and determined eyes — awoke in us a fear that our optimism was shallow and unworthy. During August London had been excited and people had already begun to shout "Business as usual." But there was no excitement in France: people worked too hard for that. I remember that in the mornings we used to walk silently, each busy with his own thoughts. But in the afternoons we threw off our oppression and — such is human nature — welcomed the real but transient moods of light-heartedness that visited us from time to time.

For myself, I love the childlike foolery (tomfoolery? — yes) in which most people who have left their teens

can no longer indulge. Lacking all sense of personal dignity and instinctively hating the solemn owliness of the middle-aged, I slip easily into any entertainment that is offered me. Now Tom Webster is the most resourceful man I know. A little glade of fir-trees that we came across one afternoon was quite enough for him. The glade ran up a gentle hill on our left. "Pavlova!" he cried suddenly, and, leaving the road, scrambled through the hedge; a minute later he was fifty feet above us, bowing gravely in a semicircular clearing. There began a dance — wonderful, grotesque, inimitable. Mordkin and Pavlova. Webster pirouetted and sprang, frog-danced and swan-danced, languished and loved, and, finally, died unutterably on the turf. There was no skill, of course; indeed it was the absence of skill, the ecstatic clumsiness of his movements, that enthralled and amused us.

In this and many other ways he lightened our gloom until we came to Amiens. Here for the first time we were, so to speak, in the war. Only a few days earlier the Germans had entered the city and marched off — no one knew whither — a thousand of her citizens. But now the firing line was farther east, though no one knew at what hour the enemy would arrive a second time. The guns roared and boomed day and night without cessation. But though we were so close to the fighting, we had much less war news than the people of Edinburgh or New York. We told ourselves that if the Germans entered the city again we should be arrested as spies and shot without a trial. Perhaps we should have been, for, as a matter of fact, we were there to pick up what news we could and communicate it to whatever quarter it might prove useful. We carried no papers save our passports, and I began to feel that

we were in as dangerous a position as ignorance and adventure could well have brought us. But this element of danger only exhilarated Webster. True, he was not satisfied with Amiens: he wanted to get closer to the enemy. Not in the least was he depressed by the stillness and brooding apprehensiveness of the streets, nor by the large groups of people who, standing in silence, eyed us suspiciously and, as it seemed to me, with frank hostility as we passed them.

He and Stokes set out eastwards early one morning to see what they could see; but they had not proceeded a mile, by footpath and country lane, from the environs of the city before they were turned back by angry and gesticulating sentries. Other attempts to be shot at ended in failure.

Though it had been a simple matter for us to enter Amiens, it was not so easy to escape. All kinds of formalities had to be gone through at the Hôtel de Ville before my wife and I were allowed to depart for Paris; we left our friends in Amiens, meeting them again on the boat for Folkestone. It is typical of Webster that he had remained in France until his last penny was spent. He and Stokes, we found, were travelling stecrage.

But most inadequately have I presented Tom Webster to you. He is a man of a hundred moods; but most of us are men of a hundred moods. He is a mass of seemingly contradictory qualities and defects; but so are we all. What he does to-day he may reject to-morrow, and what he plans for the morrow may be spurned when that morrow comes; but that is the way of all artists. So here I give three scenes showing him in three different moods.

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*Public-house near Fleet Street. Afternoon of a wet day
in the spring of 1914*

PRESENT: — CUMBERLAND (*intent on flattery*) and
WEBSTER (*coy and uncatchable*)

CUMBERLAND. Splendid cartoon of yours this morning, Tommy. How the devil you think of your captions, I don't know. You're more malicious than I am. Some day there'll be a row — you'd be easy prey for a professional pugilist.

WEBSTER. Have another, Gerald. Double?

G. C. I see they had you on the bills this morning. Just Tom Webster. Pink paper, black block letters. That sort of thing will never happen to me.

T. W. (*after a moment's meditation*). In Birmingham too, Gerald. My name's all over Birmingham to-day. Bish is a good feller.

G. C. Well, he knows his job. He can recognise a good thing when he sees it. A news editor's useless who doesn't know what *is* news. *You* are news. You always will be. A cartoon of yours is an event — it's something happening.

T. W. (*hating crude flattery but loving discriminating praise — who doesn't?*) *drinks quickly and frowns.*

G. C. I do wish you'd let me have one of your cartoons, Tommy.

T. W. You can have the lot. They're lying about in the office.

G. C. I've got a Phil May and a Leslie Ward and a Max Beerbohm.

T. W. Coming?

G. C. Where?

T. W. Office.

G. C. No. I'm staying here. So are you. Listen.

What will you bet that in a couple of years you will be one of the big men on *The Daily Mail*?

T. W. Well, why not?

G. C. That's what I say — why not?

T. W. I'm fed, Gerald. You damned well feed me up. Coming? . . . Very well — stay where you damned well are. (*He goes out.*)

Restaurant in Leicester Square. Noon of a sunny day in March 1919

PRESENT: — WEBSTER (*disturbed and anxious*). Enter CUMBERLAND (*moderately gay*)

WEBSTER. Rotten day, Gerald.

CUMBERLAND. Yes? I rather like the sun.

T. W. Is there a sun?

G. C. Oh yes. Pale yellow, like primroses. But I see you're studying the racing news.

T. W. No, I'm not studying the racing news.

G. C. I'm glad. In the old pre-war days one could never be sure of one's journalistic friends' company at this hour: betting, working out odds — I hope I've got the right technical expression — engrossed them entirely. But betting was never a weakness of yours.

T. W. I'm too busy to bet.

G. C. Why, then, this patient study of *The Evening News*?

T. W. Look at it! Look on every page!

G. C. Yes. I see. This morning's news dished up for noon consumption. And a miserable *rechauffé* it makes. The usual thing.

T. W. No — not the usual thing.

G. C. No?

T. W. No.

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G. C. Very well, then — no.

T. W. You miss nothing?

G. C. Only the leading article. But we shall have that at four o'clock. We can wait.

T. W. Who reads leading articles?

G. C. I've often wondered. I suppose the man who sets them up on the linotype machine. And, perhaps, Cabinet ministers.

T. W. (*in a note of triumph*). Exactly! And how many Cabinet ministers are there?

G. C. I don't know — fifteen, twenty, twenty-five.

T. W. Well, for every man who reads the leading article there are ten thousand who look at my cartoon.

G. C. I see. It is, then, your cartoon that's missing? But surely you don't draw two cartoons a day? I've already chuckled over your cartoon in this morning's *Daily Mail*. Ought it to have appeared in the noon edition of *The Evening News* as well?

T. W. Yes. It has been arranged. But, as you see, they've left it out.

G. C. Why?

T. W. I don't know. I suppose it wasn't good enough.

G. C. Oh, but it was! I assure you, Tommy. You're being despondent about nothing.

T. W. You really think so?

G. C. All artists have their moments of self-distrust. But you must know that as well as I do.

T. W. But . . . well, perhaps you're right. But it *is* disappointing. What I mean is, Gerald, when a feller takes on a new job like this —

G. C. I know, I know. But I assure you you have no occasion to worry. I suppose I have seen at least a couple of hundred of your cartoons and not one of

them has been poor. For heaven's sake, don't allow yourself to be despondent, or your work will suffer.

T. W. (*gratefully*). Thanks, Gerald. I believe you're right. . . . You're going to have lunch?

WEBSTER'S *flat off Leicester Square. Two o'clock in the morning. 1921*

PRESENT: — WEBSTER and CUMBERLAND

CUMBERLAND. It's wonderful of you to live alone, especially as you're so sociable. I couldn't do it. I should get terribly depressed.

WEBSTER. Depressed? Yes. But everyone gets depressed occasionally. I'm glad you looked in, though it *is* so late or, rather, early. I'm off colour.

G. C. I'm sorry. You *look* very fit.

T. W. Oh, I'm well enough. But I'm fed up. This game — this life of mine — isn't what I expected. You know how it is: you want something very badly, you work like blazes to get it, and when you *do* get it, it's nothing.

G. C. I know, Tommy. I know how you feel. But it's only a mood. It will pass.

T. W. You'd call me successful, wouldn't you?

G. C. Why, certainly. Extremely so. Perhaps that's why you have these moods. I mean, you feel you've nothing left to strive for. But you have. Why don't you write? You know, I've always believed you would write excellently if you'd only give yourself up to it and go through the mill of learning to express yourself.

T. W. I don't know. Nothing seems worth while.

G. C. You work too hard. A cartoon a day is too much.

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T. W. (*anxiously*). Do you think so? Is my work going off?

G. C. No; it's better than ever. But, though you may not be conscious of it, it must be a dreadful strain.

T. W. Well, I don't feel it. I'm just — well, bored.

G. C. Then you're ill. I can no more imagine boredom taking possession of Tommy Webster than I can a snowball taking possession of a furnace. Whenever I think of vitality — energy — *joie de vivre*, I think of you.

T. W. Well, there it is. But you're sure, Gerald, you've noticed no falling off in my work? Be perfectly frank with me.

G. C. I always am. That's why we get on so well together. No; your drawings and your captions get steadily better. You have ten thousand admirers where I have only one. And no one ever gets tired of you. I spend two minutes — sometimes three — of every day of my life, Sundays excepted, on your work, and I've never once felt that that five minutes was wasted. And I suppose there are at least a million people who do the same. And yet you say you're bored. But you'll feel different in the morning.

T. W. (*smiling*). I feel different already. I know your praise is sincere, and I respect your judgment. You're a strange mixture, Gerald, of a high-brow and a good feller.

G. C. Well, you couldn't say anything nicer about me than that. . . .

CHAPTER VII

PUBLISHERS AND AUTHORS — MY EXPERIENCES AS A PUBLISHER'S READER

IF Barabbas, as Byron once declared, was a publisher, then Ananias was undoubtedly an author. But Barabbas was not a publisher, and Ananias was simply a fool. And fools most authors are, so far as ordinary and quite straightforward business is concerned. Never have I felt much sympathy for the "young" writer ("young" writers are any age up to fifty: the adjective is almost universally used to denote the beginner) who has come to me, with tears in his eyes and sobs agitating his breast, bewailing the fact that he has been "done" by his publisher. All publishers are complained of. Before I came to London I was warned against having any dealings with A who, I was assured, was an unmitigated scamp. B was worse: he "cooked" his books. C made promises that he never fulfilled. D's cheques were always dud. E didn't advertise. F was a plausible rogue who inserted deceptive clauses into his contracts. And so on. I listened to my friends most eagerly — and believed them . . . until, having considered the matter more deeply, I reflected that my kindly advisers were all, without exception, unsuccessful authors.

Now it is firmly established that if a book is unsuccessful the fault invariably lies with its publisher. It is assumed that the publisher likes losing money; if he didn't, he would make best-sellers of everything

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he issued. The author never "fails"; failure is the prerogative of the publisher. . . . It is equally firmly established that if a book is successful the publisher runs away with nine-tenths of the profits. Authors of repute — authors whose sales run to ten thousand copies — have told me this and, in doing so, have hoped to enlist my sympathy. They have gained my derision, for I have never believed them. Had their stories been true, I should have felt somewhat contemptuously amused, for to confess that a publisher has got the better of you in a contract is to admit that, through ignorance or some other defect, one has failed to get one's due; to complain that a publisher insists on sticking to his contract is to reveal oneself as a whining fool.

Authors are fond of declaring vaingloriously that they are not men of business. Well, I am no man of business, but I see nothing to boast of in the fact. I would like to be a man of business; at least I would like to have the ability to sell my books to my publisher to my best advantage. That I am unable to do so is no fault of my publisher; the fault lies in myself. Moreover, I can, if I wish (but I don't wish), go to an agent and can get him to bargain for me. Agents are expert men of business; they are only too willing to be employed; and they expect to be paid only by results. But, in this respect, I am old-fashioned. If I cannot be on terms of friendship with my publisher, then I do not wish to be on any terms with him at all. . . . But the majority of writers (quite reasonably, I admit) try to get the very last shilling out of the firm publishing their works; but it is far from reasonable for them to cry out with rage because they have made bad bargains. There is always, for them, the Authors' Society. . . . Twenty years ago Bernard Shaw wrote to me urging me to join

this Society; he pointed out that it was "our" trade union. No doubt. But I do not regard the writing of books as a trade; moreover, I have found some of my best friends among publishers, and I have yet to discover that publishers are inimical to authors.

Let me relate to you a little incident. Years ago I sent a MS. volume of my poems to Messrs Sidgwick & Jackson. In due course it was returned to me with the usual letter of refusal. Rather staggered (but I ought not to have been staggered), I wrote to this firm informing them, quite honestly, but oh! how ignorantly, that I considered my verses quite as good as, if not better than, the work of Mr X. Y., a book of whose poetry they had recently issued: this book, I may remark, was being much talked about, and its author has since become famous. By return of post, Mr Frank Sidgwick wrote to me and offered to go through my work, line by line, and criticise it in detail, if I would return the MS. to him. I accepted his extraordinarily generous proposal. . . . In those days I believed that all publishers, though clever men of business, were strangely ignorant of literature; it never entered my head that a man could by any possibility be both publisher and scholar. . . . Mr Sidgwick kept his promise, and when my MS. was returned to me I spent a week studying his damaging and humbling criticism. It was a long, cold douche; but it did me an enormous amount of good. . . . I was too young and too little experienced to realise that Mr Sidgwick's kindness was of an almost heroic nature. But it did not stop there. I sent him a novel, jejune and, I have no doubt, incredibly foolish. But when I called on him at his office he entertained me to tea and spent an hour in discussing my immature effort.

That is only one example of kindness shown to me by the Barabbases of literature. Both Mr John Lane and Mr Fisher Unwin treated me with unusual courtesy and consideration in far-off days when it was clear to both of them that no act of mine could be of the least service to them. . . . The publisher of this book (he will not read it until it comes from the binders, so I am safe) has, throughout a period of four years, been as loyal and kind a friend as man can have this side of the Styx.

It is frequently hinted in quarters where publishers are regarded with dark suspicion that "dummy" sets of books are kept by them in order that the poor and honest author may be deprived, without fear of discovery, of a large part of the sum due to him in royalties. In one set of books, it is supposed, the true sale is recorded; in another set, faked entries are made in case the author, grown suspicious, should wish to inspect the ledger, or sales-book, or whatever it is called. (It should be stated that, unless in the contract it is specially stipulated to the contrary, any author has the legal right to inspect his publisher's books of business.) The "true" books, one imagines, are kept under lock and key, and worked at only in the dark middle of the night by ghoulish creatures who batten and fatten evilly on the earnings of young but inexperienced geniuses; the faked books, no doubt, lie carelessly on desks ready for surprise visits.

Well, it may be so, for, after all, seemingly impossible things do happen on this our wonderful globe. But I invite the suspicious author to consider the following facts. A publisher of any standing employs at least one town traveller and another traveller in the country; it is their business to sell to libraries and booksellers the books published by their employer, and the largest

orders they obtain for a particular book are, almost invariably, those secured during the few weeks previous to the publication of that book. No one is more intimately aware, from day to day, of the size of a book's sales than the publisher's travellers. . . . Already we have at least two men who must be bribed to silence: two potential blackmailers. . . . As no publisher in a large way of business can possibly find time to enter up his own books — even if he had the ability to do so — he employs at least one clerk (and frequently a dozen) to do so. But we will say he has only one. . . . Three men ripe for blackmail. . . . Then there are the printers. As the law of this delightful land compels every printer to print his name on the books and pamphlets issued from his press, it is clear that he also must have some secret “understanding” with the publisher. . . . Four little blackmailers. . . . Then there are the binders, and the big libraries who buy hundreds of copies of a book in one order. . . . Say twenty men in all in collusion with Black Barabbas. . . . Need I say more? Put the matter on its lowest footing: can it *pay* a publisher to bribe at least twenty men to silence?

And yet I know well that disappointed authors who read this will shake their heads doubtfully, and will refuse to believe that only twenty-three copies of *Songs of Twilight* were sold, and that all the big libraries refused to subscribe to that exquisite gem — published at the author's expense — *The Lays of a Lyrist*. To those who fail there is always a “catch somewhere.”

I remember reading, some years ago, in one of those fascinating little books by Arnold Bennett dealing with the literary life, a statement of the author's that it was

the rarest thing possible for a publisher's reader to chance across a MS. of real quality and distinguished style by a new writer. I marvelled as I read. But now, after four years devoted to this kind of work, I no longer marvel. In those four years, during which I have examined at least one thousand MSS., I discovered only two that made me say to myself: "Here is the real thing. Here is a book which, whether it sells or not, must at all costs be published."

I began my labours as a publisher's reader with a delightful feeling of adventure. Resolved that no new writer should ever be able to declare that *his* book, now selling in tens of thousands, had passed unrecognised and unwelcomed through *my* hands, I read every word of every MS. that was sent to me. I learned better later on. I learned, for example, that in order to discover if porridge is burnt it is not necessary to eat a plateful. But at first I was resolved to be not only just to all writers, but royally generous as well. If the first fifty pages of a novel were dull and heavy, I told myself that the next fifty, by some miracle, might be engaging and bright. But they never were. I used to write my employer lengthy reports on hopeless MSS., for I felt acutely the responsibility of my position as his reader; moreover, I wished to justify to him my rejection of a MS. I spent enormous pains on my work and found, presently, that it was exhausting all my time. As I wished to write books myself, I concluded that I must either give up my work as a reader, or sacrifice my ambitions as an author. So I sought an interview with my employer.

"I like the work I do for you," I explained, "but I've no time for anything else."

He smiled.

"I expected you to tell me that a couple of months ago," he said.

"Yes?"

"Yes. You take your job too seriously."

That was charming. I had not expected to be charmed.

"Much too seriously," he went on. "Tell me — what do you look for in a MS.?"

"Two things: good writing and selling value."

"Excellent. And if a MS. has neither of those qualities?"

"I turn it down."

"Then what is your trouble?"

"It takes up too much time. I read very slowly. I can't get through a ninety thousand word novel in less than ten hours."

"But why get through it?"

It was at that moment that I was introduced to the burnt porridge simile. He pointed out that many first novels carry their own condemnation in their first half-dozen pages, that only a work of genius can survive a thoroughly bad first chapter, that few writers of real ability can pen even a single illiterate page, and that the "real thing" may sometimes be "sensed" in the first paragraph. All this I knew; but I had not put it to myself in quite that manner.

"Quite," said I. "I have been letting MSS. get on my nerves."

So, by degrees, I cultivated a speedier method of dealing with the works of authors old and young. Even now I still give to my work more time and attention than are really necessary. It is better so. Suppose, on the one hand, that a "difficult" book of the nature of *The Nigger of the Narcissus* came my way, and I

rejected it, or, on the other, that I turned down a best-seller like — well, like nothing on earth. In either event my employer might forgive me; but I should certainly never be able to forgive myself.

The time has passed when I open each new MS. with a thrill of anticipation; but the time will never come, I hope, when I shall forget those strained, difficult days of my youth when during eight years I spent the best hours of my leisure in writing four novels all of which (it is with gratitude I say it) were consistently rejected by publisher after publisher for the bewildering reasons that they were either not quite good enough or not quite bad enough. I do not forget those days and, for that reason, I never refuse a promising MS. without asking my employer to encourage and hearten the author whose work he is returning.

At the end of three months I discovered that I had reported on more than a hundred MSS. of various kinds — novels, poems, essays, sociological studies, biographies, and so on — and had not advised my employer to accept one of them. The discovery shocked me. For what am I paid? I asked myself. It seemed to me that anyone could reject a MS., but that only a man of courage dared accept one. But a little consideration showed me I was wrong. It *does* require courage to sit in your employer's office three or four hours a day for four days a week and tell him, at regular intervals, that no single piece of writing that has been sent to him from strangers is good enough to publish. It requires more than courage: it demands a devotion to duty of which I had never thought myself capable. But how I longed to meet with a MS. showing even a gleam of distinction! How I dreamed

of "discovering" a writer of genius! How I prayed each day that something golden and beautiful would come my way!

And, suddenly, something happened. A dirty and tattered MS. was given to me. There was in it abundant internal evidence that it had already visited half the publishers in London, and as I turned its leaves it exhaled the atmosphere of failure. . . . But I thought of Charlotte Brontë and *Jane Eyre*. That wonderful story, you will remember, was refused by many publishers before it reached Messrs Smith, Elder & Co. Charlotte Brontë (inflexibly honest — or incorrigibly careless?) had packed it each time in the same piece of brown paper that bore the tell-tale names and addresses of all its former rejectors. . . . But this bedraggled MS. was far from being a second *Jane Eyre*. If I had followed the burnt porridge advice, I would not have read more than a page, for the writing was almost fantastically illiterate, the punctuation wildly original and the dialogue full of puerilities. It was, I think, the splendid incompetence of the writing that lured me on from page to page until, lo! I found myself unfeignedly interested. I was, indeed, held. (I am not easily held.) I should like to be able to say that I read the story at a sitting; but I did not. It was much too long. But I finished it within twenty-four hours. In spite of the fact that I was offended by every paragraph, I read it voraciously.

It proved one of my pet theories — viz. that the chief mission of a novel is to tell a story. No matter how bad the writing may be, nor how jejune the psychology and the characterisation, if a story is built up and presented with the unconscious art of the born spinner of yarns, it will work its will on the reader. . . . So,

full of enthusiasm, I strongly recommended it for publication. Having read it, my employer was unimpressed. He did not understand my enthusiasm. But, secretly, he gave it to the doyen of London travellers, a man subtly skilled in selecting best-sellers. The traveller appeared in a few days, joy stamped on his face. He had read it, and his daughter had read it. He estimated its sale at fifty thousand copies. It was "tried" on other people, expert and simple. There ensued a chorus of praise. . . . So my employer gave way. The gentleman who had produced this masterpiece was induced to consent to its revision by a competent hand, and in due course it appeared simultaneously in three continents.

It did not sell fifty thousand copies. But it did very well indeed, and I noticed that my employer began to regard me with new interest and pride.

I have related the above circumstances to demonstrate to you that a reader is required not only to recognise sheer literary merit whenever it is placed before him, but to detect commercial possibilities in work that, from a literary point of view, is beneath contempt. It will appear like self-glorification if I state that very few readers possess both these qualifications; but the statement is undeniably true. Publishers seek their readers here and there, and often select a man of great literary attainment but no flair for the best-seller. George Meredith was such a man. Meredith, I have no doubt, turned down many a MS. that, when published by a rival firm, proved a winner; he tried to bar the way to rubbish, but he can never have been a great commercial asset to his employers. Sir Hall Caine, on the other hand, must have been a great money-maker for Bentley forty years ago.

What course, it may be asked, does a reader pursue when he receives a MS. of great literary merit but no commercial possibilities? It all depends upon the reader. But it may be said at once that no publisher of real standing rejects a fine book solely because he knows that he will lose money on it. He will cheerfully lose money on first-rate work, and he will do so for two reasons: the first, because to issue a book of great worth reflects credit on his firm; the second — and the one that weighs with him most — because he has a genuine passion for literature. Unsuccessful authors will, I know, find it difficult to credit this second reason. No doubt practically all publishers are primarily men of business, but no publisher worth his salt is without a deep love, an absorbing passion, for what is fine and original and imaginative in literature.

If, then, so few works worthy of publication are sent to a publisher by new authors, from what source does he procure the books that fill his Spring and Autumn lists? It is in answering this question that one reveals the fact that a really fine publisher is not only a man of business and a man of letters, but a wide-awake journalist as well. Half the books he issues have originated in his own brain. If he were to sit in his office and wait patiently for what the postman might bring, he would perhaps only once in a year receive a MS. worth while. To procure his MSS. he has, so to speak, to go out into the world and get them. He may issue from his office only once or twice a week, but his thoughts must dwell continually upon the doings of the great world encircling him. No less than the editor of a great newspaper, he must keep his finger constantly on the pulse of the public. What is the public wanting?

In what direction are the thoughts of the public drifting? Who are the inventors? — what are they doing? — in what manner will their inventions affect our social life? In what new way are people amusing themselves? — what are they likely to want to do in the long evenings of the coming winter? — what, precisely, are English people doing in Switzerland in December, January and February? And the arts and sciences — how are they being developed and by whom? What are the religious movements of the day? Whither are our explorers travelling? What is the “feeling” of the masses in regard to sex, the drama, literary criticism, rural life, home and foreign politics, labour, and so on?

A publisher who cannot answer correctly these and a hundred similar questions is not likely to win even a small success. He must be audaciously alive to the passing moment. A book that succeeded ten years ago would drop dead from the press if issued to-day; a volume for which the public has no use to-day may very easily sell in thousands the year after next. For we live with enormous rapidity; whatever degree of stability our social and intellectual life enjoys from week to week is secured by the constant shifting of thousands of mutually opposed forces, most of which alter their strength and their direction with bewildering rapidity. It is the business of the publisher to watch these forces day by day; hence he is an omnivorous reader of newspapers, weekly journals, monthly magazines. Only politicians and journalists live so intensely in the present moment as he does, and if one eye is directed towards To-day, the other is equally intent on To-morrow. In that way he lives, and in that way he thinks.

As I have said, half the books he issues have had their

origin in his own brain. He observes that a certain book is wanted — say an intimate, personal volume on Ireland since the revolution of 1916. There are ten or twelve men and at least two women who could, if they wished, write an absorbing book on that subject. Which of them will he approach? It is part of his business to know who is the most likely man; his encyclopædic mind will, as it were, summon each possible writer before him, and will select him who is most likely to consent. George Russell? No; no inducement — least of all money — would be likely to persuade Russell to such a task. Stephen Gwynn? Possibly. T. P. O'Connor? Scarcely. De Valera? No. And, even if he would, his book would hardly turn out what is wanted. James Dunn of *The Daily Mail*? Possibly; but his is too genial a soul to give the book the necessary sting, the malicious indiscretions. . . . But name after name would come to the publisher until he would make his final selection. In nine months the book would be issued, and a few months later he would discover that his bright idea had netted him, say, five hundred pounds.

A publisher, then, is a man who inspires other men to write. If he cannot do that, he will soon discover himself in a reedy backwater of the literary world. It sometimes happens, of course, that an author — for even authors are occasionally visited by ideas — will “propose” a subject for a new book. But this occurs only infrequently. As a rule, it is the publisher who fertilises authors, and disposes them to the writing of books. This frequently occurs even in the case of novels. Mr W. B. Maxwell, for example, began his career as novelist at the suggestion of a publisher, and publishers do not hesitate to suggest subjects to

novelists whose work they issue. . . . He makes no charge for doing so. (Authors' Society kindly note!)

But I have said nothing of the MSS. that are offered to the publisher by literary agencies and by writers already well known. I have kept silent because, as this subject is simply a matter of bargaining between agent and publisher, or author and publisher, it does not interest me. Nevertheless I must admit that literary agents have a certain claim on my attention. Let me say at once that, in my view, they are no manner of use to the beginner. Their work consists in wrapping a MS. up and sending it, with the sort of note the author himself can easily write, to a suitable publisher. In due course the MS. is returned to the agent. Once again it is dispatched. And yet again. No particular influence is brought to bear upon any publisher, for the plain reason that no particular influence *can* be brought to bear in the case of an unknown writer: the book must speak for itself. . . . For this onerous work, which the author can do as well as the best agent on earth, the agent is paid a minimum fee of two guineas. And the worst of it is, the agent may be careless. When he receives a MS. back, say, for the fourth time, he or his clerk (it is nearly always a clerk) may omit to dispatch it for the fifth.

I write from experience. Many years ago I sent the MS. of a novel to one of the widest known literary agencies in London. I waited for eight months, but nothing happened. I did not forget all about my work — what author does? — but I imagined that my agent, having received his fee, was doing all that was humanly possible with my novel. But one day I chanced to be in London, and, governed by impulse, I called upon my agent without warning him of my

approach. He received me blandishingly, and I told him my business.

"Who," I asked, "is doing me the honour of reading my MS. now?"

I expected him to ring a bell to summon a clerk. Instead, he frowned, lifted himself heavily from his arm-chair and left the room. He was absent a long time. When he returned he had my novel in his hand.

"It has just come back?" I asked.

He nodded, and, as he placed it on the table before me, I noticed that the cover of my MS. was thick with dust. Evidently, said I to myself, it has been lying here for months. That annoyed me. And my agent hadn't even troubled to wipe off the dust and so conceal his dilatoriness. That annoyed me still more.

"You have read it yourself?" I asked.

He hesitated.

"Yes. At least one of my readers has. An admirable piece of work, I'm told. We are sending it only to the best publishers."

"Who has already had it?"

He named three publishers.

"Only three in eight months?" I asked.

"Only three. They're very slow, you know. Thousands and thousands of people are writing novels. Each one has to wait its turn."

"I see. And the last? Who was the last?"

Reluctantly he gave me a name.

"And it has just come back?"

"Yes — just "

I pushed the book across the table and brought it to rest under his nose. Then, leaning forward, I stuck out a forefinger and marked a cross in the thick dust. He was suitably impressed.

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"I will take it with me," I said.

He sighed in a manner that suggested the world was too much with him, and, with his own literary hands, wrapped it up for me. We parted in silence.

Ten minutes later I was in the office of the publisher who, my agent alleged, had last considered and rejected my "admirable" yarn. I made a few inquiries. . . . It was as I had expected: they had returned my MS. to my agent more than three months previously.

CHAPTER VIII

T. P. O'CONNOR — ARTHUR MACHEN — PERCY A. SCHOLÉS
— HANNEN SWAFFER — HOLBROOK JACKSON

ABOUT a year ago Mr T. P. O'Connor, M.P., summoned me to his flat in Westminster. I was shown into his library, a rather heavy room of extreme orderliness. Whilst I waited for his entrance I examined the books that lined his walls. They were precisely the kind of books I had anticipated finding there: histories; biographies; works of reference; the books of a politician; the books of a journalist. Not the books of a man of letters.

The room had an air of calm efficiency. A maid brought me a newspaper: it was *The Daily Telegraph*. I sat down opposite a large, business-like desk, and fell to musing on T.P. He had known Parnell. That made him seem wonderful to me. In a minute or so I should be talking with a man to whom Parnell had spoken. I recalled my long conversation in Berlin, ten years previously, with Karl Klindworth, who had been an intimate friend of Wagner's, and I remembered that Klindworth, to my romantic eyes, had appeared to reflect some of Wagner's glory. Would T. P. O'Connor, in some magic way, bear the imprint of Parnell? It was possible. Both were Irishmen. They shared the same devoted love of their country; they held ideals in common. Yes! it was possible. . . . Parnell and Emily Brontë and George Borrow! Strange, enigmatic figures. . . . My thoughts wandered. . . . Perhaps I

should learn something of Parnell's secret. Perhaps I should catch . . .

Silently the door had opened and T. P. O'Connor stood before me. I knew his age was seventy-four, but he looked at least ten years younger. I was impressed by his height, his air of fitness and vigour, his alertness. He began to tell me why he had asked me to call. He was, he said, about to revive *T.P.'s Weekly*. Would I write for him? Assuredly, said I. He had read *Set Down in Malice*, and I could see that the kind of stuff he wanted from me was scarcely what he had found within the covers of that exasperating book. I assured him that I was extremely adaptable: as a journalist, I was skilled in giving my various editors precisely what they required of me.

Up to this moment there had been nothing on his desk save a sheet of blotting-paper; but there suddenly appeared — whence, I know not — a copy of the current number of *John o' London's Weekly*.

"I have never seen this paper before," he explained. (O T.P.!) "But I'm told it has a large sale. Now you are very clever at character sketches; you hit people off skilfully." He opened the paper. "It is not an easy art, though a lot of people try their hand at it." His forefinger dropped in the middle of a column. "This man, for example. Well." He read half-a-dozen lines. "It means nothing. Just words. What he says about this woman he could say about any woman. You won't write like that, Mr Cumberland."

"I can't," I assured him. "Of all the things I can't do, that is the one thing I can never do."

He smiled.

"But not *too* peppery," he warned.

"No. Always polite. Kid gloves. And yet — well, a *soupçon*?"

"Yes, a *soupçon*."

He went on to talk of short stories. He asked me who were the best writers of short stories to-day. "Stacy Aumonier," I ventured. He shook his head; he had never heard of Stacy Aumonier. "D. H. Lawrence." No; he did not seem to know Lawrence. "Frank Swinnerton." No. "C. E. Montague." No. I had mentioned seven or eight names before he appeared to recognise one of them, and as we conversed further I discovered that he was rather out of touch with modern literature. He knew nothing of what was going on. True, he had read Rebecca West's *The Judge*, and he told me that he thought it had been greatly overpraised. But that criticism, combined with his ignorance of what was going on in the literary world, made me feel that it was now too late for him to revive a popular literary paper. On his own confession, he had only just become aware of *John o' London's Weekly*, and already he was making the cardinal error of trying to pick holes in that admirable organ. . . . He would be wiser, I said to myself, to recognise all its excellent points and try to "go one better." The man who underestimates the power of his enemy is likely to be beaten by that enemy.

"Yes, I want a short story every week," he went on.

"Perceval Gibbon," I suggested.

"Gibbon?"

"Oh, you *must* know Perceval Gibbon," I remonstrated. "I don't say he is the greatest artist living, but he's a man of extraordinary attainments, and he knows just about all there is to know about short stories. But he's expensive."

That statement seemed to hold T.P. He questioned me with his eyebrows.

"Two hundred and fifty pounds," I said.

"What for?"

"One short story."

"Oh — but — well, that used to be a year's salary for a very able man in the old days, Mr Cumberland. Still."

"He might let you have a story for fifty," I said. "He doesn't always get two fifty. But I don't know."

"To start off with — yes," he ruminated.

It was at this point I thought it wise to introduce the subject of my own remuneration. I flushed at the thought, and became ridiculously nervous. But why shouldn't I talk about money? This, after all, was a business transaction. But my tongue began to cleave to the roof of my mouth. A horrid sensation. And so I left T. P. O'Connor, feeling that I had been wholly inadequate.

But as the chorus of bearded ones sings in *The Immortal Hour*: "But this was in the far-off, far-off days." It was in August 1922 that I was summoned to T. P. O'Connor's flat; he expected to publish the first number of his revived journal two months later. But it has still to appear.

It was E. C. Buley, the brilliant Australian journalist, who afforded me the opportunity of listening to Arthur Machen's conversation. I was drinking whisky in a journalistic tavern — "tavern" is such a *respectable* word! — as was my horrid habit in those days, and Buley was at my side talking of ancient Greece. (Buley talks well on all subjects from poetry to skittles.)

"There's Arthur Machen," said he, turning round and

facing a table at the back of the room. "Let's join him."

Machen was sitting with two or three other men, all unknown to me. Buley, in his free-and-easy way, hailed the group, pulled out a chair for me, and sat down; straightway he plunged into the middle of a subject without introducing me — no doubt he thought I knew everybody — and I sat down to listen.

I knew Machen well by sight, and had often admired his picturesque exterior, his look of dreamy serenity. Also, I knew his journalistic work: I read it every day: and wondered how so fine and distinguished and curious a mind could contrive to grapple with the blatant happenings of the hour and give a touch of distinction to his account of the most strident London incidents. I looked at him now with curiosity, feeling that he belonged to the age of Johnson, Boswell, Reynolds, Garrick and Goldsmith. He was out of place, and, in spite of the fact that he was drinking beer from a tankard, he did not "fit."

But alas! I was not to hear much of his conversation, for Buley was in a talkative mood, and the rest of the company seemed well content to listen. Machen spoke a word now and then, spurring on the talk when it seemed inclined to lag, but even though he listened attentively enough, he gave me the impression of being aloof, withheld. It was impossible to discover his thoughts, impossible to sense his emotions. Yet I felt that he was content: he inspired the atmosphere of sociability: he liked people to be about him. . . . A strange impression he gave of distance and intimacy. He was most assuredly "with" us, yet he was apart.

It is good to hear that he has temporarily deserted

Fleet Street, for literature will gain more by this circumstance than journalism will lose.

Mr Percy A. Scholes is typical of most of those who suffer from the itch for writing and yet have little to say. It is an uncomfortable condition in which to find oneself, for relief from restlessness is sought in self-expression but is never found. . . . Little to say? Yes. Most of us who write books are occupied, consciously or unknowingly, in exploiting our own personalities, in committing to paper egotistic confessions of our virtues and defects, our repressions and desires. But if we are without personality? — or if we possess a personality that is dull?

Mr Percy Scholes, the musical critic of *The Observer*, has the mind of a schoolmaster, and the outlook on life of a self-satisfied minister of Nonconformity. It was Rutland Boughton who, many years ago, introduced me to him in Manchester. At that time Scholes was inordinately proud of being a Bachelor of Music. . . . To possess a degree in Music is an indiscretion; to flaunt it is to invite disaster. Disaster overtook Scholes in the shape of an educational, “uplift” paper entitled *The Music Student*. He became its editor: it was a position for which destiny had designed him. *The Music Student* was a priggish organ to which various well-known men were invited to contribute articles for which they were told they would receive no payment. Many of them consented, seduced, no doubt, by the opportunity to “educate” the young and innocent. In the course of time Scholes applied to me for an article. I disliked *The Music Student* intensely; I thought its tone smug and old-maidish; and, being a poor and hard-working journalist, I resented being

asked to write an article for the love of Mr Percy A. Scholes. (The relationship between the editor of *The Music Student* and *The Music Student* itself was not, I was given to understand, one of undiluted sentiment.)

Nevertheless, I consented to write the article on condition that I was allowed to choose my own subject. That condition was acceded to. So I wrote a criticism of *The Music Student*. Why not? It stood in need of criticism. I attacked its method of education, its academic dryness, its note of maidenly rectitude. Did Mr Scholes print my article? He did not. But he waited until his enemy (I was his enemy) wrote a book, and then his paper sniffed at it disdainfully, and printed a few lines of emasculated verbiage.

During the war Herbert Antcliffe edited *The Music Student*. In his hands it became human and readable. But Mr Scholes has now a wider field for his playful academicism.

Hannen Swaffer is one of the best-known and most widely liked personalities in London journalism. He is at once modest and aggressive, shy and self-assertive, hard-working and idle. I do not think I have ever met anyone with so marvellous a memory — a memory for faces; voices; isolated and, apparently, unimportant facts; dates and names; books and stories; quotations and titles. He carries in his head a veritable theatrical encyclopædia. He knows perhaps three thousand people in London, and two-thirds of these people are to be found in *Who's Who*. His nose for news is infallible; he scents the important happening before it arrives. As a journalist, he has vast knowledge and great experience. He is a man of quick

decisions, unflurried temper, and unspoiled kindness of heart. He possesses the bigness of heart so typical of Fleet Street men, and scores of young and inexperienced fellows have been helped by him in the way of money, time, advice and work.

I am convinced that Swaffer will eventually become almost a legendary figure. Already many tales are told of him, some of them, no doubt, apocryphal, but all typical and good enough to be true. He has the ascetic, thin face of the hard worker and thinker. . . . You didn't know that a journalist was required to think? Then you know nothing of journalism. . . . His face is what psychologists describe as "repressed," but he knows no repression save in his writing. He can communicate more in a paragraph of a dozen lines than a leader-writer in a column. For long I have regarded his column, "Plays and Players," in *The Sunday Times* as a masterpiece of journalism: it is alive, it is full of information, it is of the hour.

It was before the war that I first met Swaffer, but it was only for a minute. Yet, when I came across him five years later he remembered me as readily, and his greeting was as spontaneous and friendly, as though we had been meeting week by week. But though our paths crossed only once in the old days, I well remember witnessing an encounter between him and Sir Herbert Tree at (I think) a fancy-dress ball in the London Opera House. Swaffer, it appeared, had objected (in print) to something Tree had said or done on the stage. Tree took him to task. Swaffer, whimsical and tantalising, listened gravely while Tree did his utmost to let off as many verbal fireworks as possible. But Swaffer's was the sharper wit, and it proved all the keener and more stabbing because of the delay caused by his slight but by

no means unpleasant stammer. . . . I saw Tree move away beaten by the weapons he himself had chosen: he looked annoyed and inconsolable. Swaffer, on the other hand, gazed into space with eyes that held a sudden rapture.

There is at least one admirable book to Holbrook Jackson's credit, *The Eighteen Nineties*: it will remain as a classic study of a curious and not widely understood phase of our literature. I have no doubt that Jackson has it in him to write many more books of equal, and perhaps greater, merit, but he has been drawn by circumstance into a kind of journalism that has served him none too well, and his great gifts have been spent on work that can scarcely have been always congenial.

He came to London with A. R. Orage and together they infused fresh life into *The New Age*, making of it a fearless and distinguished organ of political, social and literary criticism. But Orage's was the stronger, the more courageous and (I say this without offence to Mr Jackson) the more idealistic personality. It would, perhaps, be truer to say that Orage was more *convinced* than Holbrook Jackson. At all events, he threw himself into the world of ideas with a passion that Jackson could not emulate, and soon their connection was severed. There ensued for Jackson a period of Fabianism, in which he wrote on a variety of subjects. But one always felt that he had not yet decided precisely what he wanted to do. Then came his work as editor of *T.P.'s Weekly*, a bright but niggling little paper that it must have been a continual annoyance to supervise. (He had as assistant Reginald Buckley, a curious creature who attached himself to Rutland Boughton, for whom he wrote mild and maidenly

operatic libretti.) *T.P.'s* died during the war, and Jackson revived *To-day*, or, rather, borrowed the title of Jerome's defunct paper for an entirely new and altogether charming monthly.

But not one of these various occupations has provided Holbrook Jackson with a medium for his thoughtful and grave personality. If he writes now, I do not know where his work may be found. . . . I have called him "thoughtful and grave." Those adjectives describe well what I have seen of him face to face. He is not of those who sparkle; indeed I imagine he distrusts mere sparklers and all their works. His essential seriousness of mind has stood in the way of a quick and wide success. In a word, Nature intended him for the writing of books. Journalism may disturb, but it rarely quickens, the ruminative mind. And it is Jackson's method to give long consideration before he writes.

CHAPTER IX

SOME CONSIDERATIONS OF THE MODERN NOVEL

NOT easily do I lose my temper, but I am invariably moved to anger whenever I hear (and I frequently do hear) someone bewailing the circumstance that in these days so much rubbish is published in the form of novels. The complaint is usually made with an aggrieved air, as though the speaker suffered terribly, and in a very special manner, from the low standard of modern fiction, and more often than not it is made by someone whose knowledge of to-day's novels is of the most casual nature and who, in any case, is incapable of distinguishing a fine work of art from a mere best-seller.

It is from the pulpit that this cry of anguish most frequently comes. I hate to suggest that professional jealousy is the emotion from which it arises; still, our churches and chapels are notoriously empty, and our circulating libraries do steady and satisfactory business. If men and women, on Sundays, prefer novels to church, as millions of them undoubtedly do . . . well, it is unwise of the parsons to declare that the novels read by their parishioners are rubbish. For, if they are rubbish, then what must the sermons be? Occasionally, it is true, a parson will base his sermon on a new novel, but his ignorance of what constitutes literature inevitably seduces him into praising something worthless. The late Bishop of London once preached a sermon on Guy Thorne's *When It Was Dark*, with the result that that

melodramatic and crude novel quickly became the most popular book of the season. . . . But, for the most part, our novelists receive nothing but sneers and rebukes from the gentlemen who have taken it upon themselves to lead us to the path of light.

But let us, for a moment, leave modern fiction and consider another type of book which throughout the year is profusely issued from the press. I mean books of sermons. Now almost continuously for twenty-two years it has been my business to examine rather more than one thousand books each year; true, I do not read one half, or even a tenth, of them, but I do read sufficient of each book to make it impossible for anything really meritorious to pass through my hands without recognition. Of these thousand volumes quite an appreciable number contain sermons. Most of them are published at their authors' expense: they bear that fact largely advertised on their every page: type, paper and binding are of a quality greatly inferior to that which any publisher would use who had a commercial interest in the *sale* of the volumes. . . . At this point we may ask, What are the motives that induce a writer of sermons to pay for the publication of work which he knows well from experience no publisher will issue at his own risk? There may be several motives, but we may be sure that all of them are rooted in vanity. . . . The writer of sermons is as vain as the minor poet. He himself seems to have a suspicion of this, for almost invariably he prefaces his volume with a kind of apology in which he states that he has been asked by many friends why he does not issue his sermons in volume form. I know those well-meaning but not wholly sincere friends. They wish to be "nice" to the vicar or curate, and the easiest way to be nice is to flatter.

The poor parson, however, takes their question at its face value; those to whom a modicum of sense still remains put their MSS. away when all likely publishers have refused them; but those whose vanity is impervious to every set-back spend their little savings on the printing and binding of their poor and halting efforts, and are amazed when, in due course, their publisher reports that precisely seven copies of their book have been sold.

Of the many hundreds of volumes of this kind that have reached me there have been only two or three that indicated the possession by their authors of more than average intelligence. By far the greater majority have been feeble and footling, as, indeed, might have been expected. Each of them, also, has contained a portrait of its author: a portrait revealing a narrow-faced, high-browed, compressed-lipped man with an indefinable look of smugness lurking deeply in his oh! so candid eyes. If modern fiction may be dismissed contemptuously as rubbish, what term of disapprobation are we to give to the spiritual sustenance offered us by many of the clergy?

The parson, then, should be the last man to attack the alleged lack of merit in modern fiction. Let him, before doing so, look to his sermons. When he has done that, let him read forty or fifty of the books he is so ready to condemn; if he be still angry, we shall know that his anger is due to any cause save that of the incompetence and folly of what he has read. For the truth of the matter is, modern fiction has never in this country reached so high a level as it has done to-day.

Historians who have chronicled the development of our social life during the last hundred years have taken little account of the curious suddenness with which in

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the year 1830 works of prose fiction, hitherto scarce, began to pour over the land in a thick, regular stream that has now become an uncontrollable torrent. Masson estimated that in 1820 there were about twenty-five novels published in England, a number that for some years previously had varied but slightly. But the amazing year 1830 witnessed the birth of no fewer than a hundred and one works of prose fiction. For nearly thirty years the annual total remained almost constant, but in 1870 it reached two hundred, in 1874 four hundred, and in 1913 one thousand and fourteen. No one has yet troubled to investigate what special circumstance, or combination of circumstances, made 1830 so notable a year as regards the quantity, if not the quality, of its fiction.

Sir Walter Scott has been casually blamed or praised, according to the point of view of the individual writer, for unwittingly revealing this new means of obtaining comparative wealth; but *Waverley* was published in 1814, and sixteen years elapsed before any appreciable increase in the number of published novels can be observed. An American writer, Professor Lathrop, has pointed out that the causes of the second great increase in the yearly product of British prose fiction — an increase dating from 1870 — “are associated with the general progress of industrial democracy; cheapened processes of mechanical reproduction, the diffusion of an elementary education, the increased leisure of hand-workers and small merchants, diminished seriousness.” . . . *Diminished seriousness!* O Lathrop, thou descendant of Puritan ancestors! O professorial mind! What is more “serious,” more vital, more packed with ideas and (if thou likest the word) more strenuous than the fiction of this moment? . . . That is to say,

Lathrop explains how the popular demand for fiction has arisen; but he makes no attempt to discover and disclose the multitudinous causes that for many years have conspired, and still conspire, to raise the general level of fiction higher and higher, until we find to-day that it has reached a condition of comparative excellence that is a continual source of astonishment to serious students of contemporary literature.

I have already pointed out that glib pulpiteers — and I may here add hasty journalists — cry out upon all modern fiction for what they term its shallowness, its illiteracy, and its essential insincerity. No doubt many novels are insincere, illiterate and shallow; but so are many epics, more theological works, and still more books devoted to politics and sociology. The development of an art can be appreciated and estimated only by an examination of the best examples of that art; the fiction of the last twenty years provides these examples in almost startling profusion. It has been argued that we have to-day no writer of fiction who can favourably be compared with the giants who worked in the middle decades of the last century, but history abounds in examples of the vain practice of praising the past at the expense of the present. The glamour of tradition, of death, of a vanished epoch, hangs over the names of Thackeray, Dickens, George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë; for two generations critical opinion and the world's approval have buttressed their reputations; they have conquered time. But Mr Joseph Conrad has the misfortune to be still alive and working; the generous amplitude and wonderful architecture of Mr Arnold Bennett's *Old Wives' Tale* are obscured by the theatrical trivialities of his serial stories, whilst Thackeray's wild oats — witness *The Yellowplush Papers*

and *The Adventures of Philip* — have long since been reaped and burned by time; *The New Machiavelli* of Mr Wells suffers in repute from the inability of some people to judge it impartially, because of their hostility to the great body of that writer's political and sociological thought. But this pastime of comparing the greatness of living novelists with that of the Victorians is necessarily futile; the question can be decided finally only a hundred years hence; it will, indeed, decide itself. Meanwhile, there can be no dispute that many even of our second-rate living novelists, in the matter of technique, are much superior to the best writers of the last two generations. Each year at least a hundred novels are issued that, as regards structure, fall only just short of perfection; they are well and firmly built; there is a nice adjustment of the subsidiary to the main plot; the minor incident is so devised and distributed that, instead of clogging the action, it develops it; the dialogue is life-like; the narrative is energetic, and the descriptive passages are never burdened with tedious philosophic disquisitions.

But technique in works of fiction has until recently been regarded as of little consequence, for it is recognised that as yet the novel, as such, is formless, or, at all events, may assume almost any form with impunity. Novelists appear to have assumed that because life is shapeless, and because their art is the one that most minutely describes the complicated machinery of life, their work is made the more effective and "truer" the less it is controlled by the æsthetic laws lying implicit in that work's nature. The great Victorians were great in spite of their incongruities, the lack of unity in their work, their slap-dash arrangement of incident, and their blurred outlines.

It is the "solvent power" of imagination that is the secret of genius; it will enable an Emily Brontë to triumph over all her faults of craftsmanship, and will lend an Olive Schreiner a power that sets at naught the shackles imposed by inexperience. But not for this reason have men of genius been so disregardful of craftsmanship when writing fiction. Rather has their craftsmanship been poor, because the novel as a form of art has been regarded in this country with a tolerance only just removed from contempt. Little more than a hundred years ago Sir Walter Scott concealed his authorship of *Waverley*, because, in the words of Minto, "he considered the writing of novels beneath the dignity of a grave clerk of the Court of Session." Men who have not the profoundest respect, and a love approaching adoration, for their art are not likely to dig down to first principles and discipline their material to perfect order and beauty.

It has already been disclosed that I hold a brief for modern fiction. I am enthusiastic about it. Moreover, I maintain that it is a great intellectual feat to write even a second-rate novel, though I am well aware that most people of only very average intelligence firmly believe they could write a more than passable novel if only they set their minds to it. . . . Few things cause me more amusement than to hear commonplace people remark: "I must write a book some day — when I've nothing better to do." They might with equal sense say: "When I can spare the time, I intend to compose a symphony." Only novelists themselves know the extraordinary and continuous mental effort that is required to write a novel; only they have experienced the intense labour of creation; the intellectual

effort required to discipline one's material; the hopelessness and pain of long weeks of sterility during which the written word seems an abomination, and inspiration a delusive fire; the inability or, at least, the difficulty of viewing one's work as a whole, as an architect may view his design or a painter his picture; the uncanny and corroding distrust of one's powers — a distrust that visits all those whose attitude towards literature is one of high endeavour. No novelist worth his salt asks or desires that all these difficulties should be taken into account when judgment is passed upon his writings, for he knows that a work of art challenges criticism solely by virtue of its inherent faults and virtues. . . . But the ordinary man is apt to estimate the value of a piece of art in inverse ratio to the ease with which it may be appreciated and understood, never guessing that a fine lucidity and reasonableness may have been come by only by untold intellectual labour and spiritual spending.

Robert Louis Stevenson somewhere or other remarks on the grit and determination required by a beginner to write ninety or a hundred thousand words — the average length of a novel — without any assurance that the result of his labour will be even tolerable. You who read a story in eight or nine hours rarely, if ever, trouble to consider the labour that story has cost its writer. Anything between six and twelve months is the usual time devoted by a novelist to one book; during these months his story is with him at least half his waking life; it is with him as he lies down at night and when he wakes in the morning. There may be periods of weeks in which he writes no line, but all the time he is patterning out his incidents, "realising" his characters, devising a hundred methods of imparting

truth and reality to his work. Arnold Bennett has told us that in every novel he writes he reaches a point where he feels that his story will break him; at that point he must gather all his forces together, call upon his last ounce of strength, put forth his final spiritual effort: in short, pit his psyche, his intellect and even his physical strength against the intractable material in which lies embedded the dream he would unfold for his and our delight. Those of us who have only a tithe of Arnold Bennett's gifts reach that point many times in our efforts to write the novel that shall express fitly the truth and the beauty we feel within us.

The reader may be amazed to learn that more than a few writers of fiction regard their work with so serious an eye. Then let him consider the following names; I write them down not in any arbitrary order of merit, but as they occur to me:—Joseph Conrad, Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, Rebecca West, Leonora Eyles, E. M. Forster, May Sinclair, J. D. Beresford, D. H. Lawrence, Frank Swinnerton, W. L. George, Sheila Kaye-Smith, Clemence Dane, Maurice Hewlett, W. J. Locke, Michael Sadleir, Norman Douglas, Rose Macaulay, George Moore, James Stephens, H. G. Wells, Compton Mackenzie, Hugh Walpole. If all those writers are not of the first rank, it is not because of any lack of seriousness on their part, or because they have not consistently attempted to give of their best. With one or two exceptions, they have written no single page that, rightly or wrongly, they have not considered essential to their high purpose. To condemn modern fiction wholesale in the face of those names, as is the modern manner, is to declare oneself blind to literary beauty, impervious to the appeal of intellectual honesty, and incapable of distinguishing good writing from bad.

Literary beauty. . . . Well, I admit frankly that most of our most distinguished writers are not solely, or even chiefly, concerned with the search for artistic beauty. They are of their age, and all branches of art to-day reflect the experimentalism of our social, religious and scientific life. Our intellectual being is flooded with new ideas, new concepts. Though it may be true that humanity knows no more to-day about the essentials of our existence — our whence, why and whither — than it did five thousand years ago, yet it does seem to us of this generation that we are, as it were, within sight of the outer threshold of these essentials. The soul of man, looking within itself, has seen something, a little; out of this little many theories have been evolved, and the novelist, having tested these theories in the light of his own experience, has not hesitated to dramatise them, to make them the basis of his psychology, and with them to rake and sift all the facts that he has garnered concerning the nature of man. Dislike Freud and Jung as we may, the debt of mankind to them is already large, and few novelists of the younger generation are altogether immune from their influence. . . . But it is not only in the world of psychology that we are face to face with new ideas, new knowledge; in almost every branch of life we are rapidly, even feverishly, discarding the used for the unused.

All this, of course, is common knowledge. But it is not, perhaps, so generally recognised that it is the novelist who disseminates new ideas. By virtue of the freshness, the eagerness and the liberality of his mind, he is accessible to fresh knowledge: he discards nothing that enables him more fully to understand mankind. Clemence Dane, D. H. Lawrence, J. D. Beresford and

May Sinclair have told the library subscriber much that was hitherto hidden in text-books or forbidding treatises; into the texture of their work they have woven a few strands of the new psychology. . . . There are, indeed, at most only half-a-dozen distinguished novelists to-day who strive to tell a story solely for the story's sake. Those half-dozen writers may, for that reason, be the greater artists: I do not know. But my point is that the vast majority of our writers consciously or unconsciously fertilise the mind of the masses, and in doing so achieve an educational work whose value is by no means widely recognised.

One of the commonest complaints made against modern fiction is that it deals almost exclusively with sex. It does. And it does so either in the romantic manner of Compton Mackenzie, or in the curious, inquiring and baffled style of D. H. Lawrence. Now and again we get a notable story from which sex is almost entirely eliminated, but when an author makes an experiment of that kind he rarely repeats it. . . . It is noticeable that those who cry out for stories without sex are generally so unalert that they are unaware of the dozen or so novels of that nature that we have had quite recently.

Is it possible to have a really moving and absorbing story that does not depend mainly on "love" interest? It is possible. . . . Many — more than twenty — years ago Mr Arnold Bennett pointed out to contemporary novelists that life had other interests than those connected with the reproduction of our kind. I recollect that among the subjects he suggested for treatment was a cathedral. Quite recently, as most of my readers are aware, Mr Hugh Walpole published a

striking story in which a cathedral dominated the lives of most of his characters. There was, it is true, some love interest, but it was subsidiary to the main theme, and the book succeeded with the public because the main theme was made almost as vital, as ravaging and as terrible as love itself. Almost: for not even genius can make the lust for power, or any other human passion, appear as overwhelming, as disintegrating, as evil, and as noble as that supreme passion which springs from sex.

“But,” object those fiction readers who have tired of sex romanticism and sex psychology, “love is not the main interest in life. Normal men and women are absorbed by love only for a few short years. The rest of their existence is given to work, to the demands of ambition, to political and social intrigue, to furthering the interests of their children, to religion — to a thousand varied preoccupations. Why, then, do our novelists always and inevitably give to sex an obsessional value which in real life it does not possess?” The answer is that sex-love is the most universal of all the emotions: it has been experienced by everyone, and for that reason it is of widespread interest. And, though sex does not occupy the whole of life, it is the most powerful factor in life: it dominates all the larger gestures of mankind: its capacity for joy and tragedy are limitless: and it controls our attitude towards art, religion, literature, money, ambition . . . in short, towards everything.

Nevertheless, many intelligent people do feel that many of our “cleverer” novelists are exclusively preoccupied with sex for its own sake, and, resenting this, they cry out for an ampler horizon, a freer air. They are right so to cry. The great novelists of the

world have rarely been obsessed by anything save by life itself. And very rarely have they been "clever." Mere cleverness runs to exclusive preoccupations, to morbid gloatings, to specialised study. I do not for one moment condemn cleverness; I merely remark that cleverness is only cleverness. Brains were never cheaper than they are to-day, and it is a profound error to confuse cleverness with genius. In intellectual and spiritual greatness cleverness is taken for granted and is never remarked upon; we do not think of that quality in considering the work of the great Victorians.

Often I have thought it strange that, though for the last two decades all our life, and our modes of presenting life in art have been experimental, few attempts have been made to develop the form of the novel. Its shape, its mode of presentation, its very "approach" to life remain to-day very much what they were fifty years ago. Its content has undergone some development, or, rather, change; but that is all. What we may call the psychological method of Henry James has led many writers to elaborate analyses of character; but the form of the novel itself is unaffected.

The only two writers who have made radical experiments in method are the two greatest of our active writers — Joseph Conrad and Arnold Bennett. (Arnold Bennett is not consistently great: sometimes he is almost cheap: but he has written great books.) Conrad, without deliberation, it would seem, will give you a novel that, before you read it, has passed through three minds: his own, the alleged teller of the story, and a third person who has related part of that story to the original teller. The form, the method — for the new method scarcely charges the form — is ingenious and subtle;

but it has the disadvantage of clumsiness, though its effect is to cast a glamorous haze over reality and to quicken the imagination. . . . In two of his larger and more significant books Bennett tells a story twice: once from the point of view of his chief female character, once from that of his chief male character. Very interesting as an experiment; but the experiment has not been repeated either by Bennett or another.

Now, if we agree that music is the most plastic of the arts, the art of the novel must come second in its capability of being moulded to any shape. Yet it has not been so moulded. In music the symphonic form has been so rapidly and so originally developed that new presentations of the old form have frequently remained undetected until acute minds have pointed out their fundamental identity of structure with the original model. Yet modern music is an older art than the modern novel. At every point in every decade it breaks away from tradition until, quite speedily, new conventions, having taken the place of abandoned "laws," themselves become part of the musical canon for a time, only to be themselves discarded later on. This extraordinary plasticity of music is in part, no doubt, due to what I may term its natural empiricism: music is in so ghostly a manner related to life that life itself cannot hold in check the arbitrary development of music.

But, after all, is the relation between fiction and life so close as it would seem? Is not the form of the novel almost grotesquely at variance with life? Does fiction ever reach down, or reach up, to the spiritual essence of life as music does in *Tristan and Isolde*, as poetry does in a lyric of Wordsworth, or as painting does in the *Mona Lisa*? . . . To me fiction is but a fumbling with

the keys of life, a juggling with externals, a clever patterning of seemingly related "facts." I divine in this "form" that we moderns have made a new form — many new forms; they lie hidden as faces and hands are hidden in the sculptor's block of marble. But if you ask me what these new forms are, I cannot tell you. But I have no manner of doubt that some day this new shape — these new shapes — will be discovered and disclosed.

CHAPTER X

PEN PORTRAITS: BERNARD SHAW — MAX BEERBOHM
— G. K. CHESTERTON — AUGUSTUS JOHN — IRENE
VANBRUGH — GODFREY TEARLE

YOU can't begin to understand Bernard Shaw until you realise that he is both a Puritan and a prophet. Puritans have never been witty; prophets, though wise and even wily, are invariably pompous and frequently dull. But because G.B.S. is quite the wittiest Irishman living, and because he is never (never? — well, hardly ever) boring, few people see the Puritan-prophet beneath the skin of the farceur. He is that most tedious of all creatures — the reformer; he writes "to make us good." But *what* a reformer! He mocks, he beguiles, he excites; he lights gorgeous fireworks only to jeer at you for admiring them; he seduces you to prolonged laughter and then shows you, ruthlessly and delightedly, that what you are laughing at is — yourself.

He is sixty-six. Forty-six of those years have been spent in London, for he left his native Dublin at the age of twenty, feeling, rightly enough, that his real place in the world was in the world's largest city. As there were many millions of people to reform, he began work at once, speaking to bewildered crowds in Hyde Park — telling them about the wonders of Socialism and the still greater wonders of Bernard Shaw. He discovered that the public was even more grossly ignorant than he had imagined possible. So he poured his electric

energy into every channel that would receive it, writing novels, musical and dramatic criticism, plays, pamphlets, essays, letters to the Press, and thousands (I do not exaggerate) of newspaper articles. It takes a good deal to wake England up, but after twenty years of labour Shaw found that he had at last become an object of some curiosity. As Omar sings: "He knew about it all: he knew." His telegraphic address, so to speak, was "Cockshaw." He could never understand why anyone could be in doubt about any question at all, and he preached the gospel that it is better to have wrong opinions than no opinions at all.

All Shaw's books might be included in a "How To" series. One, indeed, is entitled *How to Settle the Irish Question*. His book on Ibsen could rightly be called "How to Understand Ibsen." He will explain everything for you, telling you the common sense about the war, Municipal Trading, the Fiscal Question, Socialism, Music, Art, Vivisection, Vegetarianism, Malthusianism, Shakespeare and the Musical Glasses, Pew Rents and Prosody. G.B.S. will never realise how frightfully dangerous a little learning can be to a brilliant man. For he *is* brilliant. A keen, logical brilliance it is.

When in the mood, he bears you down with talk that, though full of sense and like steel in its toughness and strength, soon leaves you with a feeling of exhaustion, of futility. You become dumb before his torrent of words; saying everything himself, he leaves nothing that can be said by you. His judgments on men and their work are forthright and delivered with gusto. He is incapable of jealousy, of meanness, and he has been known often to offer the other cheek — not in humility, but in humour.

In spite of his seeming intimacies, he is remote,

secluded, withheld. You may meet him often and flatter yourself that at last you are beginning to know him, when lo! he eludes you, mocking, Puck-like, innately shy.

Max is one of the few literary men who have survived the bad, sad, mad days of *The Yellow Book*. Most of the Vigo Street poets and artists of twenty-five years ago died of drink, insanity, drugs, suicide or (more respectably but with less picturesqueness) merely consumption. But the half-brother of Sir Herbert Beer-bohm Tree has never suffered from the *fin de siècle* taint that seduced so many of his colleagues to an early grave; a robustly ironical attitude towards life armoured him against the glamour of an untidy Bohemianism. Never did he, like Ernest Dowson, make a habit of supping hectically in cabmen's shelters, nor did he turn night into day, as Lionel Johnson did, and rot his brain with alcohol.

Indeed he was never a true Yellow Bookman. All his literary and artistic wild oats were sown before he had reached his middle twenties, and while still a youth he left the arena of life and took his seat in the stalls. The philosopher observes life — is amused by it, for he knows that the richest entertainment in the whole world is the world itself; and Max, if not the greatest, is the most amusing of our philosophers. He has a most exquisite and wholly praiseworthy malice. With an eager, silent gesture he discloses the incredible vanity of mankind — reveals in his victims our own follies, grotesquenesses, posturings, and dearly cherished conceit. Cruel? To the weak and to the spiritually flatulent he, no doubt, seems cruel; but to those whose search for truth is tempered by humour he is the most delightful and charming of artists.

Charterhouse and Merton College helped to mould him, and in all his prose is the quiet, unhurried beauty of Oxford. He would rather have a word too few than one too many; rather a voice just heard than the note of hysteria; rather an essay unwritten than the shrieking mark of exclamation. As his work is, so is the man.

Only once have I met him. It was in his mother's house on a spring afternoon. All the town was talking of an exhibition of his cartoons and I had expected that I would be able to detect in his manner some sign of gratification, perhaps even of exultation, at his success. But whatever he felt inwardly, he betrayed nothing of it to me. Serenity, indeed, is his secret; his penetrating intellect functions apart from his emotions and out of their sight.

For many years he has lived in Italy; it may be that only from a distance can he get the political, social and literary life of London in its proper perspective. To him in far Rapallo many of us in England, no doubt, seem doubly absurd. Now and again he intrudes upon London and for two or three weeks we talk about him and his work, visiting the Leicester Galleries time after time to savour the delicacy of his wit and to delight in his unsparing irony.

His caricatures are not always pleasing to their subjects. Some men, flattered by the distinction of having their folly exposed to the public by so masterly a hand, buy the caricatures of themselves that Max has drawn, and place them conspicuously in their drawing-rooms. Others buy them and conceal them. And there is the story of X, who, furiously indignant at the "liberty" Max had taken, bought his own portrait and destroyed it. Probably Max's one regret in life is

his inability to do for himself what he has so skilfully and scrupulously done for others.

It was Edward Carpenter who, many years ago, while drawing my attention to the early work of G. K. Chesterton, informed me in his detached way that all Chesterton's friends were compelled to provide themselves with specially large chairs so that the new writer might be made comfortable when visiting them. Chesterton is big. His physical hugeness has its counterpart in an ample and spacious mind, and his spiritual nature is as large and mystical as a cathedral. He orders beer with a generous gesture; upon his most trivial articles he stamps the impress of tolerance; and there is true magnificence in his immense, consoling presence.

Only his voice is small. Quite recently, at a Lambeth Conference, he began a speech in something like the following manner:—"I don't expect any of you will hear a word of what I am going to say. I can scarcely hear myself. Fortunately, perhaps. Nevertheless, I must tell you . . ." Yet America liked his recent lectures, and I, for one, enormously enjoyed the speech he gave at the conclusion of the first performance of his play, *Magic*, produced at the Little Theatre. It was full of epigram and wise absurdity. Bernard Shaw, sitting in a box, gave an eyebrow smile to the second wittiest man in the world. Though every sentence ran and rippled with humour, Chesterton's face wore no smile; only a look of mild surprise and gentle expostulation overspread his features each time our laughter greeted him. A young girl sitting beside me exclaimed: "Isn't he a *dear*?"

Indeed everything in his personality attracts friendship and liking. It was the same with his brother Cecil,

whom it was impossible to meet without admiring and loving. Some eight or nine years ago I was invited to a dinner given in honour of the American poet, Harry Kemp. Haldane Macfall was in the chair. Opposite me sat a charming, unknown lady who flattered me by allowing me to indulge in my pet vice — talking about myself. Among many other things, I told her I was a journalist. She warmed at once. “So are my sons!” she exclaimed eagerly; “one of them writes for *The Daily Herald*.” She spoke with beautiful pride. It was not until I was leaving, two hours later, that I learned she was G. K. Chesterton’s mother, though I confess I ought to have guessed it. For many years “G.K.” wrote a weekly article for *The Daily Herald* without payment; there were things, he felt, that ought to be said, and he employed the convenient megaphone of that newspaper.

But the man himself, the inner man — what is he like? No writer of our time has given himself more unstintingly to the public, or revealed himself more royally. In spite of the fact that his books are read by the many, they are not “easy.” For the full understanding of his more serious works you must contribute a well-stored and logical mind, a quick and eager comprehension, and a sense of humour. Most mystics are humourless, and their mysticism is founded on emotion rather than on thought. But Chesterton is the hardest and most unsparing of thinkers. He may invite you to laugh at himself, but his wrath will descend on the man who dares to laugh at his principles. Like Bernard Shaw, “G.K.” is at heart deadly serious; those who are seduced by his paradox and epigram into thinking him a superb buffoon have not yet reached even the fringe of his intellect. He has the soul of a Bunyan

and the wit of an Oscar Wilde. And the secret of his psychology is his humility.

As a young man he went to the Slade School, but soon began to write. Years ago a publisher called him a liar. Chesterton replied by kicking him downstairs, an argument not generally applied to publishers; in this case it had a certain effect. He is enormously prolific and, when writing, becomes so absorbed in his work that he is unconscious of his environment.

A child? Yes, perhaps. A child in his simplicity, in his self-absorption during hours of play (work is his play), and in his essential directness. But in body, mind and spirit he is a giant — one of the great spiritual regenerators of our time.

Novelists who write of Chelsea confine themselves to the seamy side of artistic life; perhaps it is the only side they know. But every kind of life has its seamy side, and Chelsea contains other people besides cigarette-smoking models and dissolute artists. Among its hardest workers is Augustus John, perhaps the most picturesque figure in all London's great Bohemia. True, he no longer wears earrings and a brigand's hat as he walks across Piccadilly Circus to the Café Royal, nor does his tawny hair in these post-war days appear anxious to reach and caress his shoulders. Nevertheless, he takes your eye and holds it. His tall, well-made figure; his rapid, soldierly walk; his fine head supported by a neck whose muscles are firmly rooted in a magnificent chest; his handsome face, with its large, vehement eyes, broad forehead and close-cut beard and moustache — all these contribute to the making of a personality that dominates any company in which John finds himself.

I know of no man with more natural dignity, nor have I met anyone so absolutely devoid of pretentiousness. Most men of great eminence hide themselves behind secretaries and all the protective paraphernalia of "social" life; but John is continually out in the world, among everyday people, talking to any man, drinking beer with him at his favourite Chelsea hostelry, and behaving himself as though he were the most ordinary of mortals. There is no one more approachable; at the same time, there is no one who can be more devastatingly sarcastic and brutally frank in the company of those who, wishing to ingratiate themselves in his favour, smarm him over with ignorant praise. His silence can be scathing. He will suffer fools patiently, though not perhaps gladly, but a bore provokes in him a silence and a disdainful aloofness that even bores can feel.

But though Augustus John is a "clubbable" man, there is something in him that is always, as it were, kept back. Something is withheld, something that is mysterious, remote. He gives you one personality, and you find it rich, warm and full of charm; but behind that personality is another whose characteristics elude you. You feel that, best of fellows though he is, he is stripping you of all the little pretences and defences each one of us, consciously or unconsciously, wears; that he is looking straight into your secret soul, and that what he finds there interests him enormously. That, I suppose, is why his portraits are such amazing revelations to his sitters; looking on what he has painted, they for the first time see themselves as they truly are. His eyes are unsparing; the outside appearances of things do not interest him; it is the soul within that matters. So, as each fresh collection of his portraits is

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exhibited to the public, there is first a hush of excitement in the artistic and social worlds, and then a profuse talking and gossiping that soon overflows into the newspapers; all the enemies of each of his subjects come to the exhibition to gloat over John's "victims," and only the artist himself is unaware that anything very unusual is to be seen.

In spite of this ardour for truth, and his refusal to paint a woman as her mirror reflects her in her "composed" moments, John is already a fashionable painter of portraits. He works quickly, greedily, choosing subjects from all classes. There was a time when gipsies appealed to him, and I remember him taking me to his old studio in King's Road and showing me a large canvas depicting a group of untamed men and women whose defiant, yet furtive, eyes made the picture strangely and uncomfortably alive. But everything he touches he makes alive and vital. His landscapes are saturated with individuality; on to the sky and the hills of his pictures he has projected a part of himself — the mysterious part — the part that eludes you and that, you cannot help but feel, mocks you secretly. Yet there is no mockery in John. His chief characteristics are reverence for his art, an almost fanatical desire to express nothing but the truth, and a love of beauty, no matter how deeply that beauty may be hidden under seeming ugliness.

There is something delightfully naïve about this great artist. Not very long ago he gave a literary friend of mine a poem he had written, hoping, no doubt, that my friend would find himself able to praise it. But though the few lines had some striking and beautiful phrases, the total effect was weak and, indeed, boyish. Yet he produced it from his pocket with a mixture

of great eagerness and shyness, and was frankly disappointed at its reception. . . . In spite of his mysteriousness and his apparently dual personality, he has the simplicity and charm of a child.

You must have noticed that all men and women who have achieved eminence in any form of art reveal in their personalities a property that differentiates them from other people. They are enormously alive. Most people one meets appear to be half asleep, moribund almost; they are repressed, reserved; they do not react save to violent stimulus. Now all artists are almost apprehensively responsive. The least thing lights them up. It is so with Irene Vanbrugh. She has eagerness, quick springs of sympathy. She *gives* everlastingly — gives herself, her talent, her imagination, her powers of divination and interpretation. But this giving is held in check by her trained artistic sense; she does not squander herself; she gives precisely that amount of herself that is necessary to obtain the artistic result required.

Her imaginative sympathy has enabled her to take parts of the most diverse character. She has acted with Dion Boucicault (whom she married twenty-one years ago), Sarah Thorne, J. L. Toole, Beerbohm Tree, George Alexander, Arthur Bouchier and John Hare — indeed with practically all the great mimes of her time. She is old enough to have created one of the parts in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and young enough to create the illusion of eternal youth. Her talent is delicate, but as strong as steel; her skill is so consummate that on the stage she appears to be improvising instead of repeating what she has already learned. Never has she been known to over-act; most

of her effects are obtained by a slight gesture, a lift of the eyebrows, a change in the intonation of her voice. But she can be magnificently angry and scathing. It is in the interpretation of the whimsical humour and pathos of Barrie that she is seen at her best.

Irene Vanbrugh's avowed recreations are "gardening and being read to," but only her friends and acquaintances are aware of the time and care she devotes to those who are beginners in her own profession. She has none of the successful person's indifference towards the unsuccessful; hidden talent, indeed, raises her to instant action, and she will do all in her power to bring it to the light. As a worker, she spares neither herself nor those who work with her. Of only one thing is she intolerant; she hates the bombast, the loud voice, and the big stride that seek to conceal incompetence.

Those who are old enough to remember that fine actor, Osmond Tearle, will recognise something of the father in the son. Godfrey has all his father's enthusiasm and *flair*, but he has a more magnetic personality and a more malleable temperament. He falls just short of being a great actor; give him another ten years, and he may develop into a mime of the first rank. It is his "picturesqueness" that mars so much of his work. He is apt to over-emphasise the emotional side of his parts at the expense of their intellectual content.

The looks of an actor, they often say, guide his destiny. But this is true only of men of small talent. Godfrey Tearle, besides good looks, has enormous talent and enormous experience. All the difficult and subtle technique of the stage is his. His voice is magnificent, his appearance impressive, his "manner" most attractive. But, like all stage favourites, both in times

past and present, he has spouted much poppycock over the footlights. I don't for a moment suppose he enjoys doing it, but even the finest artists are sometimes compelled to give the public what it wants. Some day Tearle will be in a position to play only what *he* likes, and I have no doubt that then he will bring to fruition all the gifts that are as yet only partially developed.

CHAPTER XI

VIOLET HUNT — BOHUN LYNCH — FRANK HARRIS —
MIDDLETON MURRY — A. E. W. MASON — SHEILA KAYE-
SMITH — RALPH HODGSON

I AM continually being amazed by those critics who praise the "observation" of writers like Zola, Flaubert, Sienkiewicz, Hergesheimer, George Moore and Arnold Bennett. Let me explain at once that I do not deny that these novelists were and are "observers" in the true sense of that much misused term, but I have frequently noticed that they are extolled for that dull and unimaginative observation which employs itself in the conscious or unconscious memorising of all the articles of furniture in a drawing-room, the infinite details of a race-course, or the varied and processional beauties of a sunset. To compile mental catalogues and write them down is not the office of the imaginative writer but of the village chandler. Yet many reviewers are most perversely excited by this mechanical method of observing; they maintain by implication that the finest observer is he who sees and remembers more than other people. The contrary, very frequently, is the case. It is not the quantity, but the quality, of observation that is significant in writing. The true observer is he who sees what is not noticed — is, perhaps, unnoticeable — by others. Moreover, the true observer works not only without effort, but without knowing that he *is* working. The surface of life engages his interest, but it is what is concealed

beneath the surface that excites his power of passionate deduction. The academic mind sees with its eyes; the mind of the artist pierces and transfixes with its intuition.

All this is a preliminary to the confession that a meeting with Violet Hunt has impressed upon me chiefly the memory of a large pink hat (I am quite prepared to learn that it was blue) and long, beautiful hands exquisitely and multitudinously lined. It was in a drawing-room in Hampstead that, whilst talking to a lady who mourned to me about the late war, I became aware of the pink hat. It struck a happy note in a typically lugubrious Sunday afternoon in Hampstead. From the tail of my eye I glanced at the lady beneath the hat; I noticed she was animated, that her manner, though assured, was nevertheless nervous, and that she had the strange gift — though the gift is very common in clever people — of conversing with one person whilst listening to (and hearing) every word that is said by another.

On being presented to her, I was asked to sit on a low stool at her feet. My body, unfortunately, has no grace, and I felt at a great disadvantage as I sat, my knees hunched on a level with my chin, looking up into her live face with its restless eyes so full of curiosity. It was with horror I discovered I was seated opposite a row of occupied chairs ranged against the wall. My self-consciousness swept over me in a warm wave, and I have no doubt my opening remarks were as futile as my opening remarks are apt to be. But soon (I hope it was soon) I returned to normal consciousness, and heard her questioning me.

“You have met my husband — Ford Madox Hueffer?”

"No. But I know his work well. I know, also, his brother, Oliver, and a cousin — I think — a lady who plays the viola very nicely. I met her at Dr Kendrick Pyne's in Manchester."

But this did not interest Miss Hunt in the least. She returned to her husband.

"I don't think you'd like him," she said.

"But I like his work!"

"Perhaps. But you wouldn't like *him*."

This insistence troubled me, and I felt I was required to ask why. I did ask.

"Oh, I don't know," she mused; "few people do. They find him difficult."

"I imagine him to be frank," said I, wondering where my words would lead me; "yes, frank and, perhaps, intolerant. I mean intolerant of stupidity. But so am I, Miss Hunt. You don't mind my addressing you as Miss Hunt? I have known your work for twenty years — and the name sticks."

She did not mind. We began other subjects. She was amused at a certain lady of title who, annoyed but secretly flattered, had accused Miss Hunt of "putting" her in the story, *The Last Ditch*. Miss Hunt denied the accusation. She never "puts" people into novels.

"Do you, Mr Cumberland?"

"I have never published a novel," I told her, "but I am writing one now. I suppose the only man that an imaginative writer puts into his work is himself. But that self is always elusive: people think they see you in your work, but they generally see themselves. If, for example, you want to know what Frank Harris is really like, read his *The Man Shakespeare*."

"Yes. But, of course, each of us has many selves." And from that point she launched herself and began

to talk as I wished her to talk — freely and thoughtfully. But a very young man with musical theories was soon introduced to her, and when he confessed he knew nothing of music, but that, nevertheless, he “felt” that each musical note should be represented by a colour on a screen, and that, given opportunities, he might create a new art . . . when he had said this, and much more, I withdrew, regretting that true conversation is impossible at meetings of Hampstead intelligentsia.

I was introduced to Bohun Lynch. But as we were surrounded by chattering people, we spoke no word. A quiet, reserved man, this. Sallow, tall, well-made, he stood observant and rather aloof. Occasionally he spoke a few words to those near him, but he did not “converse.” Since meeting him I have read his curiously imaginative and sensitive *Forgotten Realms*, a book that startled me by its tenderness and intuitiveness. I might have guessed (but I did not) that that mask-like face, with its unceasingly observant eyes, hid the soul of a poet.

My attention was first drawn to Mr Middleton Murry by someone — I think it was Jack Kahane — showing me a magazine in which Mr Murry confessed that he had wept tears of grief because Mr Frank Harris had criticised harshly some of Mr Murry’s early work. Such acute sensibility as was betokened by the tears, and such lack of sensibility as was made evident by the public disclosure of those tears, compelled me to believe that Mr Murry’s psychology was worthy of study, and I have read carefully and with disciplined admiration most of what he has written during the last dozen

years. But I did not anticipate when I read Mr Murry's little imitation of Jean Jacques that before a couple of years had passed I was to see Frank Harris and Middleton Murry together.

But I was tired. Lunch with Frank Harris was stimulating; so was a long afternoon's talk with him. But by tea-time a reaction had set in, and I was anxious to be alone, for, being tired, I was fearful lest I should bore him; moreover, I wished to ponder upon the marvellous things Harris had told me. . . . Frank Harris, to me, is a fabulous creature. There is a kind of glamour about him: his masculine intellect dominated me in those days, and I still think of him with gratitude and affection. That he liked to talk to me seemed always incredible. (I never flattered myself that he liked me to talk to him.) And though his personality, with its deep energy, its untiring zest and its passionate and bitterly expressed hatreds, seemed almost to overwhelm me, I was invariably happy in his company. . . . As I have said, I was anxious to be alone, but I could not drag myself away from him, nor, indeed, did he seem in the least desirous that I should go.

And presently we found ourselves in an office in (I believe) Chancery Lane. Presently an eager, dark young man entered and broke in upon our conversation. Harris welcomed him. His attitude towards young Middleton Murry was paternal, and before two or three minutes had passed I saw clearly enough that Murry wished to have Harris to himself. Those without social ease (I am without social ease) know how difficult it is to leave a room if one is shy and if one has been pressed to remain. So I sat there, miserable. Murry spoke no word to me. He was all eagerness for Harris,

and I watched his vehement, excited eyes as the future editor of *The Athenæum* skated round the edge of a subject he wished to introduce. Not once did I see him look at me; for that reason I was conscious of his acute awareness of my presence.

Harris, wishing, I do believe, to break the tension we all could feel, told us a bawdy tale. It did not relieve the tension. Murry, no longer able to restrain himself, burst out:

"I've got an idea. An idea for a new weekly."

(Young men always have ideas for new weeklies: I have had many myself.)

"Yes?" encouraged Harris, stirring himself.

"Yes. A humorous paper with an edge to its humour. Witty. Pungent. I believe it would go. Something in the style of the French comic papers, but not so brutal. Nevertheless, sufficiently brutal. We've nothing like it in England. *Punch* is too — too — well, too like *Punch*. You know what I mean. Illustrations, of course — we must have them."

"And your writers?" asked Harris broodingly.

"No, you will find no writers. Who is there in England who can hit out?"

"Yourself and T. W. H. Crosland," I suggested, though I knew well that Harris and Crosland could not work peaceably on the same paper.

"Oh, we shall find writers," went on Murry youthfully, and ignoring my poor contribution to the conversation. "The demand will create the supply."

But Harris did not catch fire. Perhaps he knew there was insufficient capital; perhaps he divined that for this bright idea no money would be forthcoming. Nor, I imagine, was it, for Mr Murry's paper, as the years proved, was very far from being humorous,

though it was with a sigh of regret one saw it disappear into the eager but milkless bosom of *The Nation*.

Middleton Murry, I have no doubt, has developed since those far-off, restless days of quick enthusiasms and eager devotions. His work is curiously tenuous, strangely undefined. Not yet has he, as they say, "found himself." His adventures along the higher slopes of psycho-analysis have been unfruitful, and it would seem that he is still unable to place sufficient trust in his gifts. And his writing, if not careless, at least shows many signs of carelessness. Only last week I came across the following exquisite morsel in *The Print Collectors' Quarterly*:—"...in such dangerous days as these, to feel and express delight in the work of an artist largely because it shows a fairly constant pre-occupation with human nature for its own sake, is very much like trying to pass an expectant bull in a pair of vermilion trousers." Mr Murry must do better than this.

It was in the early months of the war that I called on Mr A. E. W. Mason in his flat in the West End—Stratton Street, I think. He had just returned from America where, if I remember rightly, he had been lecturing.

One remembers some men by what they say; others, by what they look like. Mr Mason has a most distinguished appearance: tall, handsome, slim and well-made, he has the bearing and manner of a prince. His eyes are keen and bright, his chin strong and well moulded. Indeed, strength and sensitiveness fight for mastery in his face. Whilst talking to him I felt that he had, no doubt quite unconsciously, modelled more than one of his heroes on himself. His manner was quick and assured. I do not remember ever to have

“interviewed” a man whose answers to questions were more direct and so entirely free from flummery. He gave me the impression of possessing an extremely orderly brain; he had thought things out and made no attempt to mitigate the downrightness of his opinions by qualifying clauses. . . . But, above all, I found him distinguished — distinguished in manner, appearance and mind. I have no doubt he possesses what is vulgarly called “the artistic temperament,” but he is not so crude or so lacking in restraint as to allow you to guess it.

Already it is recognised that Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith is one of the most remarkable writers of our time. But I believe she is much more than that. I regard her as a woman of great and admirably disciplined genius. Our grandchildren, I am convinced, will read her books with the reverence and love with which we now read the stories of Charlotte Brontë. Not that Miss Kaye-Smith’s work in the least degree resembles that of Charlotte Brontë or, indeed, of anyone else. She stands alone not only in the quality of her genius, but in its scope and in the manner in which it approaches and employs her material.

We have several distinguished woman writers to-day. There was a time when I regarded Miss Elizabeth Robins as a novelist likely to excel any other woman writer of her generation; but she failed to fulfil the early promise of *The Open Question*, though *The Magnetic North* and *Come and Find Me* were extraordinarily refreshing and vigorous. . . . Miss Clemence Dane has distinction and penetration; but she works with a glittering scalpel, and though she can tear away the surface of life, it is only a tiny scrap of life that she

reveals. She has no amplitude, no breadth. Life to her is a series of set scenes from which the open sky, the great spaces and the gusty winds are excluded. . . . Miss May Sinclair has too much cleverness and too sluggish a sense of beauty. Admirable and fascinating though her novels are — admirable in that they break away from outworn formulæ, and fascinating in their experimentalism and in their revelations of the secrets of the human mind — they are for the most part merely the expression in literature of a philosophy of psychology still in its infancy. She is too deeply concerned in the remote causes of human action, and too little impressed by the beauty of that action. It is greatly to her credit as a psychologist that she is concerned with nothing but truth, no matter in what ugly trappings truth may be found; but does she ever discover the complete truth? If she does, she does so by robbing human nature of much of its dignity, and, in that manner, she fails to touch our sense of beauty, though she may excite our wonder. . . .

No; you may consider and ponder over the work of all our woman writers, but you will find no one save Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith who regards life with philosophic completeness, with complete lack of prejudice, and with that fullness of sympathy one finds only in large and sane minds. Her intellectual gifts are remarkable. Many writers have intuition: intuition, indeed, is cheap: but not one writer in a thousand can, as she does, so surely control her material that, as it is gradually revealed to our senses and to our intellectual faculties, it assumes the perfect proportions of classic loveliness. A shallow writer has recently reproached Miss Kaye-Smith for working to a climax in the middle of her stories; but the newspaper "friend" in question

forgot, or failed to recognise, that only great writers can hold the interest long after the climax has been reached. And is not the greater part of life a slow descent to the daily round after the heady and astonishing climax of youth?

Miss Kaye-Smith in ordinary life wears neither her heart nor her genius on her sleeve, and even those who think they know her well, know only what she chooses to show them. She is well defended against the daily contacts and surprises of life. I have met her only once: not very long ago I dined with her and, after dinner, she took the chair at a lecture I gave to one of those rather absurd societies whose main function it is to enable literary people to meet and enjoy (or detest) each other's society. I confess to feeling some surprise at finding her in that *galère*, for, so far as I could discover, she was almost the only person in that crowded room of several hundred people who was not agape with curiosity and suffering from a weak but violent exhibitionism. She executed her duties with a calm efficiency that amazed me, who am congenitally nervous, and whose thoughts and words vanish when faced by a crowd. I read my lecture. Coffee followed. After coffee, discussion. And, after discussion, I was expected to "reply." . . . Quite like a political meeting. But I did not feel that I was there to make converts to my views, and I thought it no part of my business to answer the questions of unintelligent listeners, or to explain myself more fully to people whose remarks made it evident that they were incapable of understanding me. So I explained, privately to my chairman, and openly to those before me, that though it delighted me to listen to their remarks, I must regretfully (but very firmly)*decline to answer them.

But human nature is perverse. Because I did not wish to answer criticisms, a section of my audience was determined to compel me to do so. Miss Kaye-Smith defended me royally. Standing, as it were, between me and my tempters, she so tactfully and resourcefully "managed" these new, post-war Bohemians that no single word was drawn from me. She is a good speaker; with practice she would soon become first-rate. She is ready and witty; her ideas arrange themselves logically; and every sentence she delivers has the flavour of personality.

The woman herself? As I have hinted, she is not easily "discovered." She wears a tight mask of efficiency. She does not overflow. She is candid and direct and self-contained. I cannot imagine her flattering anyone, not even those she might wish to please. I cannot believe she finds it easy to be intimate, even with those she loves: something of herself must always be kept back. In her the intellect is master: her emotions are disciplined by good sense.

Though she is still young, she has written many books. Not at first did full recognition come to her; for some years her income from her work was represented by three small figures; now four comparatively large ones take their place. As one might expect, her methods of work are regular. Each morning she sits at her desk for from two to three hours, and writes with ease and with little hesitation; in that time she rarely puts down less than one thousand words, but occasionally she will write double that amount. Never, I gathered from what she told me, does she have those long bursts of "inspiration," or fitful visitations of energy, that visit Mr H. G. Wells. But, of course, it would be ridiculous to assume that all her work is done

at her desk. Every novelist knows that the really hard labour of story writing is done without pen in hand; the planning and developing of plot, the creation of character, the action and reaction of characters upon characters, the delicate mosaic-like arrangement of minor incident, the holding back here and the rush forward there, the stressing of the central idea — these and a score more difficult matters are pondered over day and night, with only short hours of relief. A novelist in the throes — I can employ no less significant noun — of creation leads a double existence: at least half of his working hours are spent in the difficult, thorny but splendid world of the imagination.

I met Ralph Hodgson on what must have been one of the most tragically unhappy days of his life. It was Eddie Morrow who introduced us, and within five minutes Hodgson had confided to us the source of his deep sorrow. I myself in those days ~~was~~ living in a world of bewilderment, of wretched drifting, of inner desolation, and something in Hodgson's courageous and manly attitude towards the blow that Fate had struck him heartened me more than I had thought possible.

It was the hour of refreshment, and we drank beer at the Six Bells in King's Road, talking in low voices as we did so. We spoke of little things, finding some ease of mind in discussing matters concerning which we all instinctively felt we were in agreement. To me it was a peaceful, if short, interval in a bitter day, and, recalling it now, I remember little save the sense of comfort and help that I got from Hodgson's calm voice, his acceptance of life's tragedy, his sweetness of mind that coloured even his simplest remarks. Strangely enough, though this happened only three years ago, I had read

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none of Hodgson's work, though of course his name was familiar to me. But when we had parted I turned to Morrow and asked:

"What is his poetry like?"

"I don't know. He does write poetry, doesn't he? I know him only as editor of *The Captain*."

When, the next day, I had procured a volume of Hodgson's poetry I found in it what I had hoped, but had hardly dared to expect, to find — the full expression of a fine, noble and tender spirit such as is almost unknown in modern literature. Reading it, I hated myself for my devotion to George Moore and D. H. Lawrence, though I am still devoted to George Moore and D. H. Lawrence.

Hodgson, if not a "great" poet, is, most emphatically, a vital one. Thirty or forty pages of his will live long after our Siegfrieds have ceased from sassooning and our Shankses are squired no more.

CHAPTER XII

MANCHESTER REVISITED

MEN, it is said, change their bodies every seven years; they appear very much the same from one seven-year period to another; yet the trillions of cells happily alive in 1916 have died the death by 1923, and other trillions of cells have taken their place. Cities are like men; they change with due regularity; but the alteration they undergo is as apparent as it is real. It is the spirit of the places that changes.

In many cities the flow of development and the ebb of reaction are scarcely to be noticed. In Gloucester, for example, the Cathedral dominates the people, steadies them: it frowns upon change: so the spirit of Gloucester remains to-day very much what it was fifty years ago. It is the same with Lincoln, Worcester, Hereford, Durham, Exeter. In them Old England remains faithful to her traditions, good and bad. In London, though men live their lives hurriedly, and though thought is rapid, social and political change is slow; the Houses of Parliament, vested interests, Buckingham Palace, club life, Mayfair, and the influence of old societies and institutions retard development, and any noticeable movement forward is due largely to the new thought that is poured into the metropolis from the universities — especially from Cambridge — and from the men of the North and the Midlands.

But in Manchester, where life has much of hardness

and crudeness, caused by the close application to commerce, by the continuous manufacture of goods by machinery, and by the proximity of man to the special article by means of which he earns his livelihood, social thought is largely engendered and governed by material things. Social problems and their solution spring from those communities in which life is a contest and poverty a near neighbour. Hence change here is rapid, for when men suffer either physical privation or spiritual limitation, they will have change, even though the means by which that change is effected entail further suffering.

Recently I visited Manchester after an absence — except for one casual call — of ten years. I found the men and women of my native city changed almost beyond recognition. Its spiritual life was worn down to a feebleness that was almost death. Its one real theatre had collapsed. Miss Horniman's work having ceased, no one had been found to take her place; instead of the plays of Verhaeren, Beaumont and Fletcher, Stanley Houghton, John Masefield, Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, J. M. Synge and other writers of genius, there were the incredible movies. In the face of this disgrace, Manchester had made a wan gesture of lamentation, but she had done nothing of a practical nature. A faint sigh occasionally suspires from the pages of *The Manchester Guardian*, and there are still to be found men who voice a bitter regret. But in 1912 so vile a thing could not have happened. The youth of Manchester would not have permitted it. For ten years ago Manchester was, in large measure, the city of youth. It was the young men who kept the Gaiety Theatre alive; who sent Richter packing; who introduced, in face of the powerful opposition of the

Hallé Concerts Society, the music of Debussy, Max Reger, Ravel, Bantock and the host of British composers to whom Teutonic prejudice had refused a hearing. It was the young men who formed the Manchester Musical Society, who wrote plays, who organised the little Swan Club which worked with such extraordinary pertinacity and secrecy to create an ampler intellectual and artistic life. . . . This group of men has vanished. Iden Payne is in America; Stanley Houghton is dead; Harold Brighouse works in London; Jack Kahane is writing novels in France; Lascelles Abercrombie fertilises other men with his ideas; W. P. Price-Heywood and Ernest Marriott, also, are dead. James Agate and G. H. Mair, who knew not the Swan Club, but who were on the side of the angels (we were the angels), have left Manchester for ever. . . . I do not know if there are to-day in Manchester any men of the type of those I have named — men to whom things of the spirit were of more importance than the mere ease of circumstance. If there are such, their voice is not heard, and their work is unknown. . . . It is a singular circumstance, and one that occurs to me only as I write, that all the men I have named, and many others who were grouped around us but were not members of the Swan Club, wrote in *The Manchester Guardian* at one time or other. That paper gave us no official recognition; it is doubtful, indeed, if it knew of our existence as an organised body; but on the rare occasions on which we desired publicly to ventilate a grievance, we enjoyed the hospitality of its columns.

The Gaiety Theatre of Miss Horniman has gone. The Theatre Royal, the home of the Calverts, the theatre beloved of Henry Irving and all the great actors of a

past generation, is now devoted to the exploitation of Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Pickford and Mary Fairbanks. Two theatres, each within arm's-reach of the other, given over to a bastard art that sinks deeper and deeper into vulgarity! Manchester is now the receiving house of Los Angeles. It contains the most sumptuous . . . yes, the most sumptuous picture-houses in our country. The dark places are thronged night by night. . . . My horriddest recollection of the Manchester I saw during my recent visit (December 1922-January 1923) is that of a tenor bleating Coleridge Taylor's *Eleanora* in the largest, most sumptuous, most airy, most comfortable (most everything!) picture-house out of London. . . .

And in this city, given over to darkness, high lights, noise and vulgarity, *The Manchester Guardian* is issued day by day. Whom does it influence? Not the people. The people know it not. Why should they? For *The Manchester Guardian* is devoted to a rather narrow and fastidious intellectuality far removed from ordinary life. It is self-consciously fastidious. Loving Liberals, it faintly dislikes true liberality. Moreover, it disdains to notice what the man-in-the-street is doing: what the man-in-the-street does in his thousands is not, presumably, now a matter for record, though in the old days it was not unregarded. I went to a Sunday League concert in the Free Trade Hall to hear Frank Mullings sing. . . . Now when Frank Mullings sings in Manchester *The Manchester Guardian* becomes ecstatic: the public is told, truthfully enough, that he is a great artist, and, on occasions, half-a-column has been scarcely sufficient to hold the news. But this has happened only when he has appeared at a Hallé Concert or at some other gathering of equal social consequence. . . . At the Sunday League concert there were more than three

thousand people; at a Hallé concert there are never even two thousand; but at the latter are to be found most of the men and women who, heedful of their reputation for "culture," dare not stay away. Yet, searching the columns of *The Manchester Guardian* on the morning after Mullings had appeared on Sunday, I found no record of his visit. So far as that paper was concerned, the concert had never taken place. This, of course, is not journalism. It is mere *snobisme*. A paper that plumes itself on its democratic sympathies and ignores the musical enthusiasm of what, for Manchester, is a very large audience, can scarcely make its influence felt in those directions where liberality of thought and a genuine, broad culture would be most welcomed.

One feels, in this newspaper, a straining to catch the attention not of the population of Manchester, but of extreme intellectuals in Geneva, Berlin, Moscow, Boston, and other places where they sit and think. It has abandoned itself to plain living and high thinking. It is desiccated with thought, and it is buttressed with the prejudice of a dead generation. Like Tennyson, it is afraid of God, death and sex. It is without passion — sicklied o'er with the pale cast of scrupulosity. And it looks a thousand times before it leaps . . . and then it does not leap.

This academic and pedantic withdrawal of *The Manchester Guardian* from the full life of the people coincides with a materialistic decade in which modes of obtaining pleasure — and, indeed, pleasure itself — have sunk to a deplorable level. In order to realise to what depths of stupid folly a certain section of our people have descended, one must not investigate the life of London's West End, but the life of the lower middle

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classes of Glasgow and Manchester. Among those classes are heard the empty laugh, the stupid jest: are seen the greasy lips, the vacant eyes, the overfed body. Their life is a prolonged gesture of greed bred by unconscious spiritual hopelessness and intellectual starvation. The war has reduced Manchester to spiritual beggary, and, in the time of need, the newspaper that Lord Northcliffe used to declare was "the best in the world" has forsaken its people and, drawing away its skirts from the contamination of the crowd, has sought refuge in an aridity of soul, a "politeness" of mind, that one scarcely expected to find outside the teased pages of Amiel and de Senancour.

CHAPTER XIII

MUSIC IN WALES: DR T. J. MACNAMARA — DR HENRY
COWARD — SIR HUGH ALLEN

BY few things have I been more amused in recent years than by the prostrate attitude of admiration assumed by the Englishman before those enthusiastic Welsh musical gatherings, the National Eisteddfodau. The ordinary Englishman is singularly guileless; so far as artistic matters are concerned, he is only too willing to be deceived; and, with regard to music, he is as tractable and as unsuspecting as a lamb *en route* to the butcher.

Now it may be said without any qualification whatsoever that the Welsh are a musical race only in their emotions. They love the obvious phrase, the insensate high note, the chromatic melody; their deepest (but not so deep) emotions are stirred by luscious harmony, good and bad folk-songs (it matters not which), sheer but exciting noise, familiar cadences, rich and fruity voices, and all the paraphernalia employed by vulgar exploiters of sound. All Welsh "parlours" and all Welsh drawing-rooms contain many examples of those modern ballads which, twenty-five years or so ago, were represented by Isadore de Lara's *Garden of Sleep*, Sir Frederic Cowen's *The Better Land*, and Lord Henry Somerset's *Echo*. We do not sing such songs in England now, for our musical Renaissance, of which Sir Edward Elgar was, and remains, the chief figure, has destroyed the old straw and given us the new corn. To Welshmen

music is, quite unconsciously, of course, a continual and gentle aphrodisiac.

Especially is this true of religious music. The compositions of the late Dr Joseph Parry, the "greatest" of all Welsh musicians, are full of innocent, unblushing appeals to the soft and softening emotions: the most tragic events in the life of Jesus Christ are presented with a sickening lusciousness that even a hysterical Italian would not tolerate. But though, to the cultured Englishman, Dr Joseph Parry is *anathema maranatha*, to the Welshman he is the Last Word in modern musicianship. Even so cultured and distinguished a musician as E. T. Davies of Bangor has a good word to say for old man Parry. "Hidden away in some of his less well-known works," he confided to me recently, "are some really quite good pages." I have read those less well-known works, but I have not found those really quite good pages. . . . To me Joseph Parry in the strangle-hold of Gioacchino Rossini is a ludicrous and repellent sight.

Only one Welshman, Cyril Jenkins, has dared to attack this fatuous countryman of his; with unexampled courage he has exposed Parry's shameless sentimentality and feebleness, and in consequence has made himself the best hated man in the Principality. To Cyril Jenkins, as to me, the music of Joseph Parry is like the indecent and self-revealing *hwyl* of a third-rate Welsh poet declaiming his unending verse.

Dr T. J. Macnamara, late Minister of Labour, claims to be "very musical." All his life, he declares, he has been "interested" in music; he has listened to as much "good" music as his circumstances have permitted, and, his age being over sixty, he has no doubt listened to a very great deal. In addition, he has, in

many respects, a first-rate brain, and I have met no man less gullible than he is. Yet when in Wales in August 1922 he — to employ an expressive Americanism — “fell” for Welsh music. Not only did he fall: he grovelled. As I met him constantly at Ammanford during last year’s National Eisteddfod, I had ample opportunity of discovering his views on Welsh music. Those views I do not share.

“You will have noticed,” he said one evening, “that people who live among mountains are invariably religious.”

“Superstitious — yes,” I interrupted; “but perhaps that is what you mean.”

“No. I mean religious. The Welsh are religious — profoundly so. One of the outlets religion uses in order to express itself is music. A religious people is always musical. That is why in this little country we find so many fine singers, so large a number of composers, so much Celtic enthusiasm for what is beautiful in sound, and such an ardent sacrifice of time in the study of the best music. Each time I have left the Pavilion the last few days I have told myself that there is in store for the Welsh a remarkable musical future. Indeed their music of to-day is remarkable.”

“It is,” said I; “very. During the last four or five days the only good music I have heard here in Ammanford has been written in England, Germany, Russia, France, or other foreign countries. The Welsh music has been uniformly bad. I except, of course, all Cyril Jenkins’ work; but he does not regard himself — nor do I regard him — as a Welsh composer; if he is to be given a label, we must call him cosmopolitan. Welsh people will have little to do with his music: almost it has been forced upon them: they can’t understand

it. You say Wales has many fine singers; it would be truer if you said she has many fine voices. You say also she has many composers: that is only half true, for from the strict point of view she has very few indeed. To regard a feeble writer of anthems and drawing-room songs as a composer is very much like calling an obscure politician a statesman. You see, Dr Macnamara, I happen to know a good deal about Welsh music — it has been one of my minor interests for twelve years — and though, like yourself, I have observed in Wales much enthusiasm, it has never been for the best music, but for music that is tawdry, superficial and commonplace.”

“I don’t agree with you in the least. I think I know what good music is. Welsh music, I admit, is different from other music — therein lies its merit.”

“Different in quality — yes.”

“No, different in kind. Folk-songs, for example. Much of their music is based on folk-songs. They have a character all their own. Many modern Welsh compositions embody the characteristics of the folk-song. The musical life of this little country, Mr Cumberland, is developing on its own lines. What is going on outside its borders is to it a matter of no consequence. Germany has her own music, France has hers — so has England and, if you would only realise it, so has Wales.”

At this point I realised that it was impossible to continue the argument unless, first of all, I furnished Dr Macnamara with a good deal of information that he appeared to lack. . . . A pity, said I to myself, that people do not argue in order to discover the truth, but solely in order to enforce their opinions. Truth is nothing: winning is everything. I smiled wryly as I recognised that this reflection applied with more force

in regard to my attitude to Dr Macnamara than to his attitude towards me.

“But,” said I, summoning all my geniality to my aid, “the musical resources of Wales are so small that she cannot hope to develop from within. To begin with, she has no orchestra of her own. In England many of the large towns either possess first-class orchestras, or they are regularly visited by first-class orchestras from other towns. The Hallé Orchestra in Manchester, for example, visits Leeds and Sheffield, and a host of other places. There is an admirable orchestra also in Liverpool. Even a little town like Oldham in Lancashire possesses an amateur orchestra that regularly plays Tschaikowsky, Wagner and Beethoven. In Birmingham and the Midlands we see the same thing. Up in Scotland they have Sir Landon Ronald and Julius Harrison conducting a body of players second only to our London musicians. But in Wales? — well, there’s nothing at all. Nor is there a decent orchestra in the whole of Ireland. And yet you talk of ‘Celtic enthusiasm for what is beautiful in sound’!”

“But Wales has her choirs —”

“And so have London and Lancashire and Yorkshire and Birmingham and Edinburgh and Glasgow and Northampton — and almost every large town and thickly populated county you can mention. And, mind you, for sheer musical intelligence and interpretative power, as well as for quality and volume of tone, many of these choirs are superior to anything you will find in Wales. But we were speaking of orchestral music. Wales, as I pointed out, has no orchestra; worse, she is so isolated geographically that no orchestra can visit her. . . . I’m sorry: I forgot. Two years or

so ago I heard Sir Edward Elgar conduct the London Symphony Orchestra in Swansea, or it may have been Cardiff: there were not five hundred people present."

"That is as it may be. But Wales has the inspiration of her mountains — her deep national feeling — her language. Are you aware that even the village grocer and the village policeman are, more often than not, poets?"

"I have frequently been told so, but I have never been able to credit it. You speak Welsh?"

"No."

"Nor I. These Welsh 'poets' write in their own tongue, so we are compelled to take their work on trust. When a Welshman writes in English, he usually writes bosh."

"That may be. But naturally a man will write his best in his own language. I always advocate the smaller peoples working out their own literary and artistic destiny untroubled by what is being created outside their borders."

"That is very interesting. But it seems to me rather cruel. For you advocate retaining all the barriers that political and social economy, adverse circumstance and nature have already erected between Wales and the outside world. Has England nothing to teach Wales? Has Germany nothing to teach her? — or France? — or . . . ?"

"Plenty, no doubt; but nothing that Wales cannot do without," said Dr Macnamara, looking at me rather fiercely, hostility in his chin, aggressiveness in his splendid shoulders. "Besides," he continued, "Wales is too small a country to absorb the culture of the entire world. You might as well ask a squirrel to assimilate

a granary. Already I am told that Welsh music is dominated by Teutonic influence."

"Only the slave is ever dominated, Dr Macnamara. . . . Wales cannot absorb the culture of the whole world? — well, so much the worse for Wales. I believe she can; and she will begin to do so the moment she recognises that music is not solely an emotional art, but an art demanding rigorous intellectual application. But it is not so much a question of Wales's power to assimilate foreign culture; rather is it a matter of the ability of a Welsh man of genius to do so. Music, of course, is a living growth; year by year it expands and discovers a greater diversity of means of expression. An English writer to-day does not use the vocabulary of Chaucer, but the typical Welsh composer employs only the technique of a century ago, when modern music was in its childhood. No; Wales, being isolated, is content to crawl while the rest of the world is marching forward. Her music — the music she herself creates — is beneath contempt, and it will remain so as long as men she respects continue to assure her that all is for the best in her best possible musical world."

There was much more to the same effect; but all to no purpose. For towards the end of the week there appeared in *The Western Mail* a magnificent article by Dr Macnamara telling Wales precisely the things that are very bad for Wales to be told. I cannot hope that Dr Macnamara read the article that Sir William Davies — as fair-minded an editor as it has been my fortune to meet — asked me to write for him a couple of days later.

The above conversation embodies the chief assertions that Dr Macnamara put forward during several general talks he had with me, and with other men in my presence. I have written it here in an unbroken form

in order to present his point of view as logically as possible. That point of view, it is scarcely necessary to add, is that of the vast majority of Welshmen. And it is so tenaciously held, and with such lamentable results, that the most eminent English musical critics who formerly visited Wales no longer go there. At last year's National Eisteddfod there was no musical critic from *The Daily Telegraph* nor from *The Observer*, and *The Times* (which I represented on that occasion) regarded the entire week's proceedings as worthy of only two articles.

There is, of course, in Wales a vast amount of excellent raw musical material: tens of thousands of fine voices, thousands of indisputably musical natures. There are also some admirably trained musicians, and a few — but only a very few — musicians who possess genuine culture. These latter, however, have little scope for the exercise of their gifts; sooner or later they are compelled to compromise with the circumstances of Welsh musical life and accommodate their ideals to their environment. Wales is a cemetery for those who possess a musical talent.

I am fully persuaded that music in Wales cannot begin to develop — cannot even begin to be music, in the true sense of the word — until Welshmen free themselves from that intellectual slackness and spiritual fear that find expression in a narrow interpretation of religion, and in a distrust of that natural expansiveness of the soul without which there is no true life.

Mentally they are indolent; spiritually they are cowards. Their cowardice stultifies their imagination. They do not even dimly sense the implications of a work of art. Music to them is notes to be sung or played;

the spiritual impulse that has brought those notes to life — that has arranged and patterned them — matters nothing; one doubts if the ordinary Welsh musician is aware that spiritual impulse precedes the creation of a work of art.

A curious and laughable example of the failure of Welshmen to recognise that music has any meaning but a purely surface one occurred at Ammanford last year. One of the test pieces for soprano soloists was "Hymn to the Sun," from Rimsky Korsakov's *Le Coque d'Or*. Those of my readers who are not acquainted either with the song or the opera will bear with me while I explain that the song is sung by a young maiden to an old man whom she is anxious to seduce. And seductiveness and sensuousness suspire from the song like mist from a tropic river on a cool evening. There were, I suppose, some thirty competitors in this class — young ladies, musically ambitious, but with unawakened imaginations. Of all the places in Ammanford in which this competition could have been held, a chapel was obviously the least suitable, yet it was a chapel that was chosen for this purpose. . . . "What," one could imagine the Eisteddfod authorities saying to themselves, "what a splendid place for a hymn! — the chap-pel!" . . . So to the chapel I went at nine o'clock one morning to hear this unabashed and pagan music sung innocently and unmeaningly by thirty of Wales's daughters. My spirit of irony and mockery was delighted by the delicious situation. The music was given with due maidenly reserve, every singer no doubt feeling a Sabbath devoutness as she essayed the melting chromatics. . . . But there was a sequel. Out of the thirty competitors the three best were chosen to sing

the same song later in the day in the huge Pavilion when the final adjudication was to be given; before this took place, but at the conclusion of the preliminary test in the chapel, one of the adjudicators explained to all the competitors that each had failed utterly to interpret the song they had sung. He described to them the opera and, in particular, the scene in which the "Hymn to the Sun" is delivered. With a humour that dared everything he pictured the seductress pleading for love. . . . Wales's thirty daughters stared in incredulous and shocked amazement. Could such things be? A few smiled and simpered; most looked stonily and with frank hostility at the adjudicator; only one or two looked intelligent. . . . Yet, a couple of hours later, when the three chosen ladies appeared in the Pavilion, they altered their tactics; the inhibitions of hymns and chapel associations were cast aside, and Rimsky Korsakov's music was interpreted as he and heaven — for surely this song came from heaven! — intended it to be.

From this little story one knows that the ordinary Welsh singer does not approach his music either with his intellect or his soul, but with the easy emotions that see in melody only melody. But one learns also that this same Welsh singer, if instructed — and shall we say instigated? — can also interpret the spirit that animates melody. Welsh people are not necessarily without imagination, but their imaginations are almost atrophied by fear. They distrust what is beautiful. It is a puritanical distrust — a distrust of what in themselves is noble and free.

Quite recently the Headmaster of the Manchester Grammar School publicly deplored the circumstance

that in our modern English life we have nothing to correspond with the Olympic Games of ancient Athens and the Eisteddfodau of contemporary Wales. If he had known the National Eisteddfod even half as intimately as I do, he would not, I think, have raised his voice to praise Wales at the expense of England. On the whole, the National Eisteddfod is an admirable institution, but it is not all that it appears to the far-off beholder. Nothing is. Its chief weakness is a fatuous self-satisfaction that nothing can disturb. It either bitterly resents English criticism or is inordinately amused by it. In consequence, many English critics no longer trouble to visit Wales. Hostile criticism is regarded by Welsh musicians as the result of jealousy. . . . In the past, Welsh singing has been so continually and universally praised that not only singers, but composers, organists, pianists and harpists as well, have come to regard themselves as the musical salt of the earth.

It is the custom of the National Eisteddfod to invite a certain number of English musicians to adjudicate at their meetings. It is a wide-minded policy; or is it a cunning one? At all events, the invited guest, treated royally and paid handsomely, never finds it in his heart to say what he really thinks. He finds, as all visitors must do, a great deal to admire in the musical life of Wales, but he quickly divines the weaknesses of that musical life — its easy and not always sincere emotion, its rawness, its lack of intellectuality, its meagre æsthetic quality. But he is tongue-tied by the kindness of his hosts; the social relationship between him and the Eisteddfod authorities makes it difficult, almost impossible, for him to be as intellectually fearless as the musical occasion demands. As a result, he praises

what there is to praise and glosses over the matters that require criticism.

The Welsh adjudicators, in my opinion, stand in the way of all progress. As far as mere musicianship goes, they are admirable. (I do not despise musicianship, but I feel contempt for all musicians who regard a musical degree as the be-all and end-all of their careers.) But they share the emotional and intellectual limitations of their countrymen; moreover, they are, naturally enough, prejudiced very strongly in favour of what one may call home products. Because English critics mingle blame with appreciation, the Welsh adjudicators attempt to readjust matters by lyrical outbursts of ungoverned praise. Last year Mr T. Hopkin Evans, speaking in Welsh, distinguished himself in this way. His adjudication of a choral competition was a model of indiscriminating and emotional laudation; in his mind, if not in his voice, there was the authentic *hwyl*. . . . Nothing destroys a vain people more surely and more quickly than adulation. It corrodes them; eats at their ambition; saps their energy. . . . True, it is a fine thing to be a nation of singers. But Wales, one day, will be more; she will be a nation of creators as well as interpreters. But while she is cosseted, petted, spoiled and praised she will remain what she is now — a people only half educated, a people of swift but shallow enthusiasms.

Dr Henry Coward introduced himself to me at Ammanford. . . . Coward is, I suppose, the most widely honoured man in Yorkshire: perhaps the most widely honoured musician in the north of England. As a boy and youth he suffered from many of the limitations that adverse circumstance can impose upon

talent and ambition. Not until the age of thirty-nine did he enter the musical profession, yet if ever there was a man who may be said to have been born a musician, he is that man. Now, at the age of seventy-three, he has the most delicate ear of any musician I know; its sensitiveness, its power of perception, its ability to separate a single voice from a score of voices is truly extraordinary. . . . With me it is always an effort, though an intensely pleasurable one, to listen to music; I must concentrate all my faculties in order to receive fully what is being given to me. But Dr Coward's psychology registers musical impressions as easily and effortlessly as a photographic plate. Sometimes we would carry on a whispered conversation whilst an indifferent choir was singing.

"Here is the prospectus of the Sheffield Musical Union for the coming season, Mr Cumberland. You see, we are doing . . . not *quite* in the middle of their notes, those sopranos, are they? Sharp — a wee bit . . . very varied programmes. I like to be as representative as possible. . . . Wooden rhythm. There, they quite missed that phrase — all is tenderness. Flat — the tenors are getting flatter and flatter. The whole choir's down an eighth^{of} a tone — now a quarter. Poor balance. . . . But we scarcely touch the ultra-moderns. Interesting men, Stravinsky and Scriabin, but in Sheffield we can't afford to make experiments. It isn't as if . . . a semitone down now: a full semitone, would you believe it? Everything's loose, they don't hold together. He's trying to rally them now — too late. They'll never recover themselves . . . we had concerts once or twice a week, and could throw in something very novel occasionally. We can't do that. It's all a matter of money, of course. Most things are.

. . . Weak attack — dreadfully weak. Down they go, down, down — seven-eighths of a tone flat.”

He was absorbed always in matters of technique — almost unconsciously so, I imagine, for though he always commented upon what he heard, he did so in the manner of a man communing with himself. He had the preoccupation with the technique of music that the true poet has with the technique of his verse: an unconscious preoccupation, as I have said: a natural passion for perfection: an uneasiness when perfection was not attained. I wondered if this absorption in a multitude of detail would obscure for him the imaginative element in interpretation, for it is, of course, possible to give a noble performance of a work in spite of technical errors in the reading of it. I broached this subject. He answered with the gentle reproach that the superb craftsman gives to the amateur to whom craftsmanship is negligible. He loves craftsmanship not only for what it achieves but also for its own sake.

I found his company both tonic and soothing. He has the utmost simplicity of mind. There is in him a modesty that is utterly unconscious of self. Once or twice he began a sentence with, “I owe my great success” . . . to such and such a thing. In many a man that would have been bombast; in Dr Coward it was the simple statement of a fact it would have been conceited to pretend did not exist.

Sir Hugh Allen also introduced himself to me, saying a few sentences of flattery that charmed me in the way that clever flattery always does. I suppose Sir Hugh is one of the busiest musicians in the country, and I have frequently wondered how he contrives to get through all his varied work. He is Director of the Royal

College of Music, Professor of Music at Oxford University, and conductor of the Bach Choir, London. At Ammanford he was at once the most cheerful and hard-worked man I came across. He is a rapid, absorbed worker: a man of quick, final decisions: a musician, I imagine, of almost infallible judgment.

I very much admired the manner in which both he and Dr Coward, when adjudicating, contrived to confine themselves to what was obviously true without hurting the feelings of their Welsh friends. Sir Hugh has humour, an abundance of good sense, and a driving force apparent both in manner and speech.

CHAPTER XIV

P. F. WARNER — JOHN BEATTIE CROZIER — BRAMWELL
BOOTH — LORD ABERDARE — LORD HOWARD DE WALDEN

“**P**LUM” WARNER sat in a stockbroker’s office reading sporting magazines; as I entered the room he peeped at me over the top of the page and gave me a shy look. Pulling out a chair, and seeming more than a little embarrassed, he wished me good-morning and asked me to sit down. I did not understand his embarrassment. It was almost as though he had been taken unawares by, say, a fulsome flatterer; yet I had not come to flatter, and a short correspondence and a chat over the telephone had preceded this interview and invitation to lunch; moreover, I was there solely on a matter of personal business.

For a long time conversation was almost impossible. Question from me, answer from him. Then silence. Another question, another answer; a longer silence. Then, from both of us, unnecessary noises: coughing, the pushing back of a chair, the tapping of a heel on the floor. Cigarette? Thanks. I have matches, thank you. More coughing. A restless movement. Gold Flake. Always Gold Flake now — war habit, you know. . . . A terrible silence, this time, it lasts for ever, until, thank Heaven! — the door begins to open! Enters a live stockbroker! Saved! The new-comer wanders aimlessly to the table, stands there a moment deep in thought, looks at but does not see us, pats his under lip

with immense deliberation, mutters to himself a vague resolve to have lunch, and disappears. . . . Jupiter! We are alone once more. It begins all over again. Quite warm for the time of the year. January's a funny sort of month. Nice yesterday, though. Still, the day before that was . . . O vile ineptitudes! I will speak no more.

But to myself I said: "How very, very different from what I expected! . . . But then people always are different."

I willed myself to indifference and fell to contemplating his record. Rugby: Captain of the XI. twenty years ago. Three years later Oxford XI. Honours in Final School of Jurisprudence. Yes, of course: a barrister: almost I'd forgotten that. But surely barristers talk? No. Not all. Not this one. . . . Captain of M.C.C. Team eighteen or nineteen years ago. South Africa. War. Books and journalism. . . . But so shy and shrinking. . . . Again I heard the silence. It impinged itself upon my every sense.

At last — what the effort cost him, I shall never know — he spoke.

"Let's go and have lunch."

It seemed a pearl of wisdom as it dropped from his lips.

Out in the open air he released himself and there began a conversation befitting reasonable beings. He complimented me on a book I had written. "Most amusing!" he said. He contrived a brief chuckle. But he did not mention the book's title. Somehow or other I gathered that, at the most, he had read only a few pages. Still, I was grateful. One is.

But soon I began to suspect that he was ignorant of my identity, that he believed himself talking not to

Gerald Cumberland, but to someone else. But I did not dare to put him right, for I was by no means sure that he was wrong. Moreover, I feared another cloud of embarrassment. But in the crowded restaurant we got on to safer ground — cricket. He had a delightful smile, a good stock of anecdote, and a real, deep modesty. He took it for granted that he was the most ordinary person in the world; it was some accident of circumstance that had placed him in more than one (to me) enviable position. From cricket he went on to golf and tennis. I gazed at his thin, sallow face, with its keen eyes — eyes that were unusually observant and which nothing escaped. By the end of our meal we were on easy, friendly terms.

On preparing to leave the restaurant, a stranger — a very young man — who had obviously been awaiting his opportunity, approached Warner in something of the manner in which a devotee nears a shrine. He murmured a few words about “being proud to shake him by the hand,” and stood panic-stricken at what he had done. But in a moment Warner had put him at his ease, talking to him with an easy and surprising casualness. . . .

Three or four days later I received a letter from the Rev. Canon Hannay, “George A. Birmingham.” It ran thus: “The enclosed photograph was sent by Mr P. F. Warner to me, under care of my publishers, addressed with my pen name, ‘G. A. Birmingham.’ A very nice letter came with it expressing the pleasure Mr Warner had found in lunching with me the day before somewhere in the city. As I hadn’t been in London since the beginning of December and had certainly never lunched with Mr Warner or asked for his photograph, I wrote to ask him what mistake had

occurred. I received in reply another very nice letter from him explaining that the photograph was meant for you and addressed to G. A. Birmingham through inadvertence. I don't know how he came to make this mistake. It isn't even as if Birmingham were the capital of Cumberland."

But even *that* did not explain away Warner's nervousness.

When I published *Set Down in Malice*, Mr Ernest Newman publicly declared that I had committed literary suicide. More or less seriously, he pictured a roomful of celebrities scuttling under the sofa and table on hearing of my approach. If that sort of thing has happened, I have not heard of it. On the contrary, I received nearly two hundred letters from strangers, all of whom expressed a desire to meet me, and most of whom invited me to lunch or dinner. The larger proportion of these invitations were from women: they imagined, I suppose, that I was the very devil of a fellow. Perhaps I am. But of all these letters I replied to only three. One was a charming communication from Dr Beattie Crozier, the well-known philosopher, historian and political economist. He declared that my book had renewed his youth; what seems to have offended some of the more solemn old-young men of my own generation had, apparently, given him nothing but delight. Would I, he asked, enliven one of the evenings of an old man by visiting him at Elgin Avenue?

I found him waiting for me in his study, a decanter of whisky, soda water and glasses ready prepared on a side table. Though his age was seventy-two, I did not discover the "old man" he had told me to expect.

His eyesight, it is true, was failing, but he had extraordinary zest, an unimpaired memory, and great curiosity concerning all the newer notabilities in art and literature. He asked me to tell him of West End life — restaurant and theatre life, pre-war night clubs, dancing, and so on. Until recently his recreations had been boxing, step-dancing and skating. I knew a little of boxing, having at one time frequented The Ring, and having seen some half-dozen of the world's big fights in other places. But I did not know one-tenth as much as he, and I listened with some amusement to the author of *Civilisation and Progress* and *The History of Intellectual Development* as he told me of his own experiences and the famous boxers he had seen.

When an hour or so had passed —

“But you said you wished me to renew your youth,” I exclaimed.

“Yes. You have done — you are doing.”

“No. You have renewed mine.”

“But I am twice your age.”

“Nevertheless, I'm no longer young, but you have made me feel so. I used to flatter myself that I had the spirit of eternal youth, but there are days (and sometimes weeks) together when I realise that all the rich glamour — all the wonder — of youth has gone for ever.”

My half-careless words seemed in an instant to sever our pleasant relationship. He fell into a deep, motionless silence; his half-blind gaze was cast down; his breathing was deep. I looked at him with concern; I felt that, most unwittingly, I had thrown him back into a mood and into memories he would for a time forget. But, presently, he roused himself and, putting

out a hand in my direction, he waved it gently as though brushing aside the words I had spoken.

"The ageing body tries to age the spirit," he said, "but, my dear fellow, we mustn't let it. I am not such an old fool as not to know that I am old, but I'm damned if I'm going to let my age get the better of me. And now you must drink some more whisky. I'm not going to allow you to leave until you have emptied the decanter."

I stayed with him until what I felt was for him a late hour, but it was with reluctance he saw me depart. Placing a hand upon my shoulder, he made me promise to visit him again soon. But I never kept my promise, for circumstances very soon compelled me to leave London, which I visited only for brief periods and at long intervals, and when I read of his death I was far away. . . .

Dr Crozier was right. A man like Frederic Harrison may, at ninety, declare that all ages have their compensations, but nothing in life can compensate a man for the loss of the restless dreams of youth. Success in middle age is nothing; it comes too late. And I cannot believe that the solvent years of the fifties and sixties, though they may bring peace and a just contentment, are worth a single week of the early twenties when the world is wonderful and each hour full of expectancy. For what are the peace and contentment of early age? They are naught save the result of a determination to expect nothing from life. . . . In old age spring must be pain and autumn a menace.

I have entirely forgotten the circumstances that took me to the Salvation Army Headquarters to see General Bramwell Booth. But I do recollect that I

had an appointment with him, that I was received by one official, passed on by him to a second who escorted me upstairs and along a network of passages, received by a third official who examined me narrowly and apparently with final approval, and, at last, taken by a fourth into the actual Presence. My last companion, having announced me deferentially, withdrew.

I was asked to sit at a broad table at the other side of which General Bramwell Booth was already seated. From the very first moment I was impressed by his benignity, his seriousness, his courtesy. He gave me all his attention, so that I received the impression that the few minutes I was spending with him were to him the most important part of the day, though I knew well they were not. He considered each question I asked him, deliberated a few moments, and then answered it fully but with a sternly economic use of words. His gaze was directed upon my eyes without cessation — a gaze kindly, solemn, wise. Once or twice I veiled my eyes for a moment, feeling I know not what of shyness; but, divining that his look was a challenge, I quickly returned it. . . . I had got to the end of my questions and he to the end of his replies, but his gaze still held mine. . . .

I remember only twice being put to shame by a person's steady regard. Once was on the occasion I have just referred to. The second was when I went, experimentally, for treatment, to the Coué Institute. At the end of the *séance* I was asked to close my eyes. When I had done so, a lady began to suggest that from that moment all my bodily organs would function with more and more normality each day: I was told, for example, that my liver would conduct itself with propriety; that my saliva would appear in the right

places in due proportions at the correct times; that my heart would beat — well, heartily; that my digestive organs would digest all that was given them for that purpose; and so forth. I remember feeling very apprehensive as her voice went relentlessly on. I trembled at what she might say next. And though my eyes were closed, I felt she was reading my ultimate secret. I blushed painfully, and continued blushing until her words had dealt with the functions of my knees, my calves, my feet. . . .

But though I did not blush when under the examination of General Booth's gaze, I felt naked, discovered. He was — I was sure of it — steadily finding out all I would have no man discover. I tried to rise, and failed. He held me by his gaze.

"And now, Mr Cumberland," he said, after a million eternities had passed, "tell me: Have you made your peace with God? Is everything right with your soul?"

It was not. I told him so; and I tried to say so in a tone of suitable regret. I informed him that I was not a believer. "There are so many intellectual difficulties," I murmured. I felt that this admission seemed to him boastful, for, on hearing it, he appeared to lose all interest in my present and future state. When he had given me his blessing, I left him; before I had turned he was immersed in his papers: already I was forgotten.

When some lords unbend there is much creaking of the joints. It is a great art, the art of courtesy. The spirit of a man is seen in his courtesy. It is a quality that cannot be imitated; without it good manners may be simulated, but they can never be achieved.

A year or so after the Armistice I had an opportunity

of observing a large land and colliery owner — Lord Aberdare — attempting to establish some sort of social contact with those who were privileged to burrow beneath the earth for his coal. I do not think Lord Aberdare is famous for his patronage of the arts, and I have little doubt that his presence at a Welsh Musical Festival (it was not an Eisteddfod) was somewhat irksome to him. But the London Symphony Orchestra had come to Mountain Ash with Mr Albert Coates, and as the appearance of a first-rate orchestra in Wales is an event so rare that it cannot be ignored, and as Lord Aberdare lived in Mountain Ash, he attended at least two of the concerts in the Pavilion.

Mountain Ash is in the centre of an enormous colliery district, and is inhabited almost exclusively by miners. A Welsh miner is not in the least like what he is supposed to be by those who have never met him. He is extremely intelligent and industrious; he has a natural love of music and some taste for literature; he has the emotional nature and quick intuitiveness of his race; and his character has self-dependence and courage. Altogether an admirable specimen of the modern democrat. It is by the labour of these men that Lord Aberdare is able to live in some kind of luxury. No doubt he has the interests of his miners at heart, but he is unable to share their spiritual enthusiasms. . . .

He sat in the "body" of the Pavilion, in a little square box, boarded off from his fellows in the stalls. Of all the seven thousand people present, he was the only one marked out for this artificial kind of distinction. He *is* like that. His aristocracy is made noticeable rather by material than spiritual and mental differences.

"We put him in that box," said one of the officials to

me, with a grin, "in order that people shall know who he is. He likes them to know." The same official also remarked, with sincere candour: "The miners are splendid fellows — they treat Lord Aberdare like one of themselves." This is more than one can say of his lordship's attitude towards his miners.

He was, indeed, an inconspicuous figure, noticeable only for his arrogance. The great music to which he listened left him (at least outwardly) unmoved; his reserve, his silence, his apparent lack of interest marked him out in that audience of excited enthusiasts.

As my eyes turned from him to the vivid figure of Albert Coates on the platform, I began half-consciously to compare them: the former exalted by birth, fortune and rank, and divorced by these accidents from close contact with his fellows; the latter exalted by genius, untiring energy, and high ideals, but, though exalted, one at heart with all humanity — one brought by his wide and sympathetic temperament very near to vast multitudes of his fellow-beings. Lord Aberdare, in the midst of that crowd, was far away from us all. One felt sorry for him.

At close quarters I found him repressed, without ideas. He had the manner, the conversation, of one who is not at ease in these disturbed and threatening days. . . . The hard, unsympathetic aristocrat is not a lovely figure.

But, of course, there are lords and lords. Lord Howard de Walden also came to Mountain Ash. A clever, whimsical, good-hearted man, this. He hung about for many hours ready to undertake any little job (and there was plenty to be done) that might be given him.

Whilst waiting for something to turn up he told me an amazing yarn about his friend, Josef Holbrooke, a story so fantastic, so unbelievable that one felt that, being beyond the limits of human inventiveness, it must be true. Perhaps, by repeated telling by an imaginative man, it had become more true in spirit than in fact. Good stories should improve steadily in the telling. . . . Josef Holbrooke, finding that one of his operas — *Dylan* or *The Children of Don*, I forget which — was to be put in immediate rehearsal, remembered that he had introduced a cerusophone into his orchestral score. But in the whole of London he knew of no player of this unusual instrument, and after a prolonged search he worked himself into a state of irritated despair. But one day he heard of a cerusophonist in Paris — an eccentric artist who, preferring to play his instrument in private, could never be induced to share his ecstasy with others. But to hear of him was to go to him. And within an hour or two of hearing of his existence Holbrooke was at Charing Cross Station waiting for the boat train. . . . He was seen there, without luggage, companionless, unshaven; but there was a look of exultation in his eyes.

But, on arriving at the cerusophonist's rooms, Holbrooke discovered he had removed, no one knew whither. There began an exciting hunt, and in a day or two half musical Paris was agog to find the missing musician. He was heard of here, there, and in a third place. He had been seen in the Louvre, in the Place de l'Opéra, at the Morgue. Someone had caught a glimpse of him in a cab near Versailles. But Holbrooke could not discover him. But a day came. . . . Having mounted many flights of stairs, the composer halted on a little landing; from the other side of a closed door

came music. At last! Having entered, Holbrooke found himself in a room furnished with a cane-bottomed chair, and eleven cerusophones ranged against the walls. All the cerusophones in the world were, it seemed, gathered together in that attic. . . . Would the cerusophonist come to London? No.

"Not if I pay you handsomely?" asked Holbrooke.

"No."

"But it's a beautiful part! No composer in the world has ever written such wonderful music for your instrument. And only you can play it."

"Yes? But I won't."

Holbrooke named a large fee.

"No. It is impossible. I play — for *myself*!"

A larger fee was mentioned.

"I'm sorry. I like money — yes. But my cerusophones I like still better."

"But why not have both? No one will steal your cerusophones."

"You promise that?"

"I promise everything."

At the end of an hour the cerusophonist had relented, and a fortnight or so later he was in London with his eleven instruments, all carefully packed and heavily insured. He reached England too late for the final rehearsal, but the music for his instrument had been in his possession some days. Holbrooke was apprised by telegram of his protégé's arrival, and just before the first-night performance hailed him cheerfully and with exultation.

Holbrooke conducted his own opera to a crowded and fashionable house. The occasion, indeed, was one of great social and artistic importance. The libretto had been written by Lord Howard de Walden, and the

music was the work of a man long recognised for the power and originality of his genius. The orchestra was first-rate, the artists the best this country could offer, and the staging not only expensive but very effective. All went admirably — indeed brilliantly — until, the music having reached a dramatic climax, the entire orchestra came to a sudden pause. In this pause the cerusophone was to sing out its sweet notes in an idyllic solo. But no notes came. The owner of eleven instruments, blissfully unconscious of what was expected of him, was seated with his hands in his trouser-pockets, a look of tired boredom upon his face. His attention was quickly attracted, and Holbrooke signed to him imperiously to begin. Much better would it have been if that sign had never been given, for the sounds that issued from the cerusophonist were such as had never before been heard on land and sea — bleats, groans and cries. . . .

A pretty yarn. But is it true, Lord Howard? . . .

Lord Howard de Walden's chief function at the Welsh Musical Festival was to fill in any little gaps that occurred in the long day's proceedings; before his large audience he displayed humour and affability, but he had neither voice nor address. He is, indeed, an affable lord. A lord who spends money freely on music and literature, and gives fat cheques to miners who sing in choirs. A lord who writes rugged poetry not always obedient to the laws of syntax. A lord who has descended affably to novel-writing. A lord who, when at home at Chirk Castle — where I saw him a year or so ago — carpenters mildly before the hour of lunch. A lord who has a fund of faintly surprising stories.

In his search to discover what he can do best of all, he has found that he can do all things equally well, He

is destroyed by his own versatility, foiled and defeated by his clever adaptability. In consequence, he has a dim but very widespread reputation; it is generally felt that he "does things," but no one quite knows what the things are that he does. I feel that he would have it so. I feel it when I talk to him, when I hear his affable voice speaking, as it sometimes does, endlessly, beginning a new sentence at the precise moment the previous one is completed.

CHAPTER XV

SEEN FROM A DISTANCE: MRS ASQUITH — REBECCA
WEST — STACY AUMONIER — PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM —
OWEN NARES — P. G. WODEHOUSE — FAY COMPTON

MOST of us are content to be merely ourselves, but Emma Alice Margaret Asquith spends enormous energy, much ink, and a fabulous amount of talk in being — Margot. Margot, indeed, has totally eclipsed Emma Alice Margaret; Margot has stamped her image on the face of two continents; Margot lives in order that plain Mrs Asquith may die, or, at the very least, be forgotten. Apart from Royalty, no woman of our time is so universally known by her Christian name. And, in the mind of the public, that Christian name stands for indiscretion, exhibitionism, and a contempt for general opinion.

It is better so. Life is not so bright or so exhilarating that we can afford to lose one of the most superbly resourceful of our entertainers. She hates prudence; she has told us so. "Prudence is a rich, ugly old maid, wooed by incapacity." So wrote William Blake; and in her bold, spear-like calligraphy Margot has copied that sentence on the title-page of her Autobiography, thus forestalling criticism of that undisciplined book. Not that she would protect herself beneath the broken wings of Blake, for she fears no man. Her superior in courage does not live. But one has only to look upon her face to see that she stands in almost dread need of that courage, for her nature has the sensitiveness, the

rawness, of a spirit that is in continual conflict with itself.

On more than one occasion I have examined that face at fairly close quarters. I saw in it spiritual humility masked by intellectual arrogance; a disdain ready and anxious to ward off hostility; an eagerness so alert that it trembled lest anything vital in life should slip by unregarded. I have never seen a face at once so alive and so carefully controlled, or eyes that absorbed their environment more quickly and more greedily. It is a truism that each of us makes his own face, for it is the expression that counts, and the expression reveals the soul within. Margot's face tells of hawk-like eagerness of mind, turbulence of soul, a vivid and passionate impetuosity, and a loyalty in friendship known only to those possessing a strain of nobility. Even her hands, strongly nervous, give one the impression that they are conscious of themselves: they think and suffer.

A complex woman, this; and, because complex, widely misunderstood. But it would seem that she courts misunderstanding. If she ceased to puzzle the world, she would begin to suspect her own cleverness, her own wilful and exaggerated originality. But in no deep sense is she original. She is merely "different."

"I was improvising in and out of the chairs, when, in the act of making a final curtsy, I caught my foot in my skirt and fell at the feet of an old clergyman." It was Benjamin Jowett, Master of Balliol. Later, he wrote to her urging her to add to her "great position" a "noble and simple life which can alone give a true value to it." Since her marriage in 1894 (she was born thirty years earlier), all Liberals, anxious for the dignity of their political creed, have in their hearts echoed these words. For true dignity cannot co-exist with the

lack of reticence of which Margot is so proud. "Prudence is a rich, ugly old maid," etc. But Blake wrote of matters of the soul and of life lived by men with their eyes turned towards eternity. He did not write for Margot. Her father, Sir Charles Tennant, sought her out after she had been sent away from the dinner-table. "He found me sitting on the billiard-table smoking one of his best cigars." No; Blake never wrote for *enfants terribles*.

Nevertheless, when all is said, here is a personality that will live when Margot herself is dust. The women of our present age will, I fear, be largely judged by her. Glib historians will regard her as typical of her period. But Margot is typical of nothing.

Ever since I read a review by Rebecca West of Mrs Humphry Ward's *Recollections* — or *Autobiography*, or whatever it was — I have been one of Miss West's most slavish admirers. It was as scathing and — yes, contemptuous — a piece of writing as you could read. Miss West, having thrust the dagger of modernity into the self-complacent Victorianism of Mrs Ward, turned the dagger round and round, relentlessly, remorselessly. It was a task well worth doing, and it was done admirably; since then Mrs Ward's reputation has never been quite the same.

Daring, indeed, is Rebecca West's most obvious and enchanting quality. In conversation she disturbs the stranger by her honesty: she is one of the very few people in the world who say what they really mean. As a result, of course, she has many enemies. Why not? To a nature as strong as hers it is almost as fine to be hated as it is to be loved. But her friends compete with each other in giving her service and admiration.

I remember Violet Hunt telling me that she had recently helped to nurse Rebecca West through an illness; she spoke as though Fate had accorded her the greatest privilege in the world. Few women receive such devotion as that.

She is the daughter of the late Charles Fairfield, of County Kerry. The name, "Rebecca West," comes, of course, out of Ibsen. She was educated in Edinburgh, and her age is under thirty. Before it was fashionable to be a suffragette, she fought for woman's emancipation. But the facts of her life count for little: it is her personality that matters. She possesses that curious and mysterious quality called "magnetism"; in any group of people she is the most vital of them all. She wins attention not because she demands it, or because her personality consciously dominates the company in which she finds herself, but because there is in her something alive, urgent and intense. Her wit stings. In discussing sociology, she cares for nothing save the raw truth. If her opinions hurt your feelings, very well, then — your feelings are hurt by her opinions.

She has beauty — the beauty that the soul gives to a face that is not conventionally beautiful. Her face is oval. A fine, thickish neck — often indicative of intellectual power — supports a noble head; large eyes that kindle and glow are surmounted by level brows; rather full lips and a square chin add more strength to a countenance every feature of which is already strong. It is a face that psychologists call "sublimated"; it has courage and self-dependence. In it are to be seen the rare qualities that have made her two novels, *The Return of the Soldier* and *The Judge*, so sensitive, so rich in beauty, and so disturbingly intuitive.

Stacy Aumonier has declared that he "just drifted" into literature. He is mistaken. It may seem to him that he began to try his hand at writing merely for the fun of the thing, or because he wished to experiment; but years before he began he must, perhaps unconsciously, have been telling stories to himself, learning to write by reading good prose with assiduous care, and studying human nature with something like passion. Writers are first born and then made, and, as a matter of fact, the author of *The Querrils* underwent an almost ideal apprenticeship in literature. Before he wrote, he acted. He gave character sketches of all kinds of people — vivid little portraits of curious men he had encountered in country lanes, in town, anywhere. He appeared in London theatres, concert halls, private houses, and soon commanded a discriminating public of his own. To act well one must have observed men and women most closely; more, one must have understood them. Aumonier *did* act well. The theatre for him was but the entrance hall to literature.

A distinguished man, this — distinguished both in mind and appearance. Self-conscious. Perhaps. Why not? His hair is worn a trifle long, and it is arranged so that his fine forehead, broad and high, may be fully revealed. Round his neck is a very high collar, and a modern stock. When in repose, his face has a look of shy eagerness; his quick eyes glance here and there gathering a thousand impressions to be stored up in his brain. It is the face of a man extremely sensitive to external stimulus; one feels that his brain works not only rapidly, but with great accuracy. And, at heart, he takes himself and his work seriously, though he likes on occasion to pretend that he is only a philanderer.

He is of Huguenot stock. His ancestors were silver-

smiths; most of his people have been craftsmen of one kind or another. And it is as a craftsman that Stacy Aumonier shines. His luck in the beginning was amazing. His very first piece of writing was a depressing short story about alcoholism. In spite of its unpleasant subject, it was accepted by "high-brow" magazines both in England and America; *The Spectator* gave it two and a half columns of praise; and, later on, Frank Harris wrote to me urgently from America. He was full of excitement about Aumonier, and wanted particulars of his career. Now when men with minds so different in outlook and texture as those of Frank Harris and Mr St Loe Strachey combine in praising a writer, that writer must have an almost universal appeal. And that is precisely what Aumonier possesses.

Phillips Oppenheim, though possessing double the brains of most of the young fiction-writing intellectuals who so noisily assert their own superiority to the older school of novelists, is as modest and unassuming as a farmer or a squarson. He would much rather play bridge than discuss Shelley. Nor is he lured by the attractions of literary drawing-rooms in Hampstead where forgather the devastatingly clever people who contribute to freak magazines and whose novels never by any chance go into a second edition. He believes it is much jollier to shoot grouse on the moors than to eat them in the company of Georgian poets.

Some of the literary intelligentsia turn up their noses at Mr Oppenheim, but most of them would willingly cut those noses off if they could spin a yarn as well as he does. Never has he written a careless story or a slipshod sentence. Life to him is rich with enjoyment; he golfs and finds recreation in most country sports; and

from his work he derives both mental satisfaction and a good income. If you tell him you like his books, he is frankly pleased; but if you pay him high-flown compliments he will begin to yawn.

They say all men may be known by the company they keep; it would be truer to say they are known by the clubs they frequent. Mr Oppenheim goes to the Savage for company — many of the most interesting men in London are to be found in that house in Adelphi Terrace — to the Garrick for good food and comfort, and to the Authors' for peace and quietness. He has a flat in the West End and a house in Surrey. He is fifty-six years old and, after a week in the country, looks ten years younger.

A splendid kind of life, that of the popular writer who has the sense not to imagine he is a heaven-sent genius! Yet Oppenheim *has* a kind of genius. There is, even in his most sensational novels, a glow and fervour that no amount of taking pains can manufacture. Some of the characters from his short stories impinge themselves on the memory and stick there for years. Mere talent can't accomplish that. But Oppenheim smiles pityingly if you use the word "genius" in connection with him. "I like to invent yarns; if you like to read them, well and good." That sums up the mental attitude of one of the best of good fellows.

If there ever was a man whose career the public has tried to ruin, that man is Owen Nares. His good looks, his picturesqueness, and his peculiarly attractive personality have snared the hearts of tens of thousands of flappers and of tens of thousands of women twenty, thirty, forty and fifty years past flapperdom.

For long he has been one of London's biggest "draws"; wherever he has gone, there the young maidens and the old maids have gathered together. I have often wondered what his feelings have been when, say, at ten o'clock in the morning in Piccadilly, he has met twenty or so seedy sandwichmen each carrying on high a portrait of an almost fabulously handsome Greek god, labelled "Owen Nares."

The picture was excellent, and no doubt a vain actor of little talent would have given ten years of his life to be able to walk down the principal thoroughfare of the world's metropolis and behold the people agape at his own portrait. But many times during the last ten years Owen Nares must have been sick unto death of his own fatal beauty, for it had the effect of restricting his experience and of limiting his chances of doing the work he wanted to do.

Profitable though it might be to be a flappers' darling, Nares longed to be given the opportunity to attract the public solely by his brains and his temperament. But managers were cunning. Again and again they cast him for parts many of which bore a family resemblance to each other.

But recently he made a firm stand. In future, flappers will see him in parts that may disconcert them, but they will be parts that will enable Nares to develop in full the great powers that have yet been only partially disclosed to the public.

He has an unusual range of talent. The cast of his mind is serious; he regards his art with something approaching veneration, and his ambition is backed by deep purposefulness and great strength of will. His youth — he is only thirty-four — has not, on the stage, been spent to the best advantage, but he is the first to

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admit it. Not that he has not worked hard. Having studied for the stage with that admirable actress, Rosina Philippi, he made his first appearance at the age of nineteen, since when he has played in at least fifty parts.

And the man himself? He was recently described to me by one who knows him as "the best of good fellows, a keen golfer and cricketer, and as hot as mustard on his work." Of one thing his *confrères* are certain: he will go much farther than many of his most ardent but uncritical admirers anticipate.

Pelham Grenville: impressive Christian names, these, for the creator of "Jeeves" and "Archie," and for the most popular and extravagantly humorous of all our humorists. But so far as fame and fortune go, Wodehouse quite lives up to his resounding name.

He was yet an infant, from the point of view of the law, when he published his first novel, and only twenty-three when he succeeded Harold Begbie as editor of the famous "By the Way" column of *The Globe*. But, like many brilliant journalists, he grew out of Fleet Street, though its camaraderie, unexpectedness and excitement delighted him. He has written eighteen books in twenty years, and now, at the age of forty, finds himself famous both in England and America. Foreigners don't — can't — understand our English humour; if they could, Wodehouse's sanity would, no doubt, alleviate the peculiarly crimson madness of the Bolsheviks, and sweeten the unpleasant odours made by the ardent disciples of Freud.

He is what the Americans call a "mixer," hail-fellow-well-met with barons and bargees, tax-collectors and taxi-drivers. His face is kindly and shrewd; the eyes,

set close together, are a little restless and hurriedly observant. When he is amused, the eyes almost vanish in that network of wrinkles possessed by most men who are accustomed to laughter and who lead an open-air life. He is devoted to almost all the more violent forms of sport and is specially keen on golfing, swimming and boxing. It is this devotion to sport, a freedom from bookishness, and a liking for the company of quite ordinary people that help to keep him unspoiled. Most successful writing men are marred by a corroding vanity that is only half concealed. Wodehouse is so little aware even of the existence of vanity that he can rarely see it in other people.

A careful and slow worker, he has won his success by sheer merit, but he would laugh at you if you told him so. "The public does seem to like my work," he would say. "Very nice of the public. And, of course, I do my best. But *merit*! I laugh and joke, and — well, the rest is just good fortune."

But the fortune is ours.

In these days talent is never hidden for long; rarely, indeed, is it hidden at all. Fay Compton was famous at an age when most people are only just beginning to look about them and learn the rudiments of their trade or art. While she was yet a child she had got to grips with life; at eighteen she was a widow. Now, at twenty-seven, she is an accomplished and eminent actress, with many years of experience behind her, and a knowledge of life and of her art possessed by few women of twice her age.

She was born and bred in an artistic and literary environment. That, of course, helps enormously. Her father was Edward Compton; her first husband was

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H. G. Pelissier, the founder and the greatest of the Follies; her brother is Compton Mackenzie. Pelissier came into her life at precisely the right moment. A month before her sixteenth birthday she joined the Follies and made her first appearance on any stage at the Apollo Theatre. Two years later poor Pelissier was dead. I remember being with Sir Herbert Tree in his private room at His Majesty's Theatre when he received a little heart-broken letter from Fay Compton, who had written to him in reply to his condolences on her husband's death. "Poor child!" he said. "She *is* only a child, you know." He paused a moment. "And yet — she'll be all right, I think, for she's as brave as a lion."

Already, before she went to America in 1914, she was widely popular. People followed her. A great section of the public goes to see the actress, not the play; it was so in Fay Compton's case, and it is much more so now. What is her secret? Well, there is no secret. It is all a matter of brains, temperament, charm and — work. She has none of the social insincerity and easy smoothness of the typical actress. In private life her manner is quiet, calm, a little aloof; she warms only to her intimates.

CHAPTER XVI

BLANCHE MARCHESI — JOHN COATES — ROBERT RADFORD
— FRANK MULLINGS — SIR THOMAS BEECHAM —
URSULA GREVILLE

NO triumph is so easy, so undeserved and so devastatingly vulgar as that of the popular singer. She has many assets, but only one gift. But of that one gift — a powerful and musical voice — she is insanely vain; her vanity breeds self-assurance and from that self-assurance arise a thousand petty affectations and insincerities; her brainless little head swells to an inordinate size and she tours through the English provinces and the American States convinced, *à la* Mary Pickford, that she is one of the great ones of the earth. Whereas, of course, she is nothing but a laryngeal curiosity. For Nature blunders sadly in the bestowal of her gifts: to the empty-headed she gives, perhaps as compensation, a marvellous voice, whilst the keen-witted and the imaginative have to go empty away. When, by some divine accident, a fine voice is allied with a robust and sensitive brain, we get a great singer; but great singers are as rare as great poets or as honest politicians. Moreover, they cannot hope to compete with those whom the public worships. When Madame Aïno Ackté comes to town, she gives pleasure to hundreds, but when Dame Nellie Melba sings Tosti's *Good By-ee* with a sob in her throat, vast multitudes lie prone and weep.

Sad, then, is the fate of the singer whose voice is

small, but whose mental endowment is unusually rich, for she has the capacity to give true and moving interpretations of fine songs, but no instrument with which to accomplish it. She is like Paderewski playing on a fifth-rate piano. Such an artist is Madame Blanche Marchesi. Like Yvette Guilbert, she has at her command a flawless technique; she does things rightly not so much by intellectual effort as by the unconscious exercise of artistic intuition — that is to say, her elaborate technique, though no doubt acquired with consistent effort and prolonged labour, is so essential a part of her mental equipment that it is now employed as subconsciously as breathing and walking.

Yet Madame Marchesi's art shows something more than mere ease; in listening to her one is not only unconscious of effort, but one feels that she is, as it were, driven to self-expression by the imperative mood of the moment. Her singing is more than natural: it is inevitable, and it is its inevitableness that persuades us to forget that her voice, as a voice pure and simple, is unremarkable.

And yet with that comparatively small voice, what wonders she achieves! Even in its upper register, where it is thin and rather piercing, it is capable of almost any kind of expressiveness; it is by turns languorous, mocking, pleading, despairing. It is not her method to wring out of every phase the last drop of emotion it contains: something is always left to the listener's imagination; she submits, rather than addresses, herself to each song, and becomes the vehicle of the fancy of both poet and musician.

Such delicate art, so admirably poised and so subtly wrought, is not for the democracy of these, or any other, days. It exists, a thing apart, with its few

enchanted admirers; we listen to it moved by only one regret — that the gods in giving a fine brain and a warm temperament meanly withheld the golden voice.

Twenty years and more have gone since I first met her. I wonder if she remembers the meeting; it is unlikely, and I have never tried to bring it back to her recollection. But I recall it vividly for two reasons: the first because of her peculiarly arresting personality, the second because it was from her lips I first heard the name of Hugo Wolf. She had recently been in Germany, where, in an hotel, she overheard someone singing an unknown but lovely song in the next room. The music stirred her so deeply that, with her innate impetuosity, she introduced herself to the singer, learned the name of the composer of the song, bought volume after volume of his music, and returned to England to sing it. . . . And well do I remember the critics' opinions of Hugo Wolf! Not one of them recognised that Wolf was anything more than "clever"; most regarded him as affected. Yet to-day he is recognised as perhaps the greatest song-writer the world has known.

Marchesi is an overwhelming talker. She dramatises everything she says. And she says a good deal. Sentences in English, French and, occasionally, German rush from her drowningly; even the circumstance of a fine day is revealed to you in a manner full of vehemence. Her enthusiasm over matters small and great is confusing, for one has to be wary in separating the important from the unessential; moreover, one is borne down beneath the very spate of her words. I remember spending an afternoon with her two or three years ago. For the first ten minutes I held my own (for conversation with her *is* a contest), but I soon

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began to weaken, and in a short time I was reduced to polite negatives and affirmatives, an appropriate smile, a shake of the head. Suddenly she stopped in the middle of a sentence.

"But what is the matter, Mr Cumberland?" she asked.

"I beg your pardon! What have I said — or left unsaid?"

"Well, a short time ago I read your *Set Down in Malice*. It was clever and bright — sparkling almost. But you yourself — why, you are almost dull."

I blushed and explained that, socially, my one qualification was that of listening well. That excuse seemed to satisfy her; at all events she acted as though it were true, and she proceeded to give me, very outspokenly, her opinions on musical life in general and on famous singers in particular. She has a barbed tongue when speaking of humbug, and the musical world, I discovered, was full of humbug.

But it was in showing me her pictures — mostly superb examples of the French Impressionists — that I began to touch the artist within her. Her glowing talk met the glow of the canvases and fused with it, and I felt that the atmosphere of excitement that encompassed us had suspired naturally and inevitably. Perhaps by this time I was half hypnotised by Marchesi's personality; certainly I felt that I was in a dream, and that the beauty spread before my eyes was part of a fabulous wonderland into which I had unwittingly wandered.

Like most men who are artists to their inmost core, John Coates retains much of the spirit of the child. To me he has always been a grown-up boy, simple,

unaffected, deliciously sincere. I used to meet him in Liverpool in the old days when most of my time was spent in the (to me) delightful company of musical people.

Few singers possess the bump of reverence. John Coates is an exception. I was always charmed by the way in which he spoke of Elgar and his music. To him in those days (and I have no doubt he feels now as he did then) Elgar was almost god-like in his oneness of mind, in his devotion to his art, and in the dedication of his life to all that was high and noble. He would allow of no criticism of Elgar's music, for any belittling of Elgar's genius pained Coates like a personal affront.

To me it always seemed that Coates's exalted and passionate rendering of *Gerontius* was finer than that of Gervase Elwes. There was something a little forbidding in Elwes, something desiccated. Coates is all ardour and fire. I remember a very refined young lady of Southport calling him vulgar; what she meant was vigorous, generous. . . . If a singer gives himself through his singing, there are always people ready to accuse him of vulgarity; they confuse reticence with refinement. Refinement among the middle classes is really fear; having no faith in themselves, they finger lavender classics, eat custard with a fork, and talk a little mincingly. . . .

Coates's kindly acts are of the kind that others do not think of. On one occasion he sang a group of modern songs at a Hallé concert in Manchester. Knowing that I was to be in the audience, he included a song the words of which I had written. . . . Charming, wasn't it?

I owe to Robert Radford the title of the present

volume. Having read my *Set Down in Malice*, he said: "Excellent, Cumberland. Some day you must write another book of the same kind and call it *Written in Friendship*. But you must make it more cutting than ever." By cutting he meant, I think, impertinent. But I am losing my impertinence.

Radford is the kind of man who masks a shy nature beneath an exterior of joviality and bonhomie. Few penetrate that exterior to the sensitiveness beneath. He is ardent, quick, imaginative, intellectually aware; his awareness, indeed, is almost apprehensive. But he has adjusted his psychology to the rigours of professional life; he has cultivated ease, poise. His platform manner has confidence and calm assurance; but that confidence has not come to him easily.

If Radford had not been an eminent singer he might have become an excellent diplomat. Most professional artists, for reasons not difficult to divine, have what may be called an excessive manner: when they meet you, they are not merely pleased to see you — they are delighted beyond measure; when they praise something you have done, they do so in terms of frantic hyperbole; when they bid you farewell, they have tears in their voice, and, no doubt, relief in their hearts. This excess is merely a convention: it deceives no one. But it creates an uncomfortable atmosphere of insincerity. . . . Radford has none of this. His "manner" is instinctively and delicately adjusted to his company: he gives you precisely what is likely to please you. When he praises, he does so with art — or do I mean artfulness? Most certainly I do not mean he is insincere. But, on the surface, he is most things to most men, partly out of good-nature (for he is immensely good-natured), and partly out of a peculiar

delicacy that makes him shrink from wounding even those who mean nothing to him. He has courtesy: a rare quality. But most of all he has wisdom. His way through life must, I think, be easy and pleasant, for I can imagine him in but few situations that would embarrass him, and both men and women must fall ready victims to his tact and charm.

It is always pleasant to have one's prophecies fulfilled, perhaps because they so rarely are so. Some twelve years ago I met Frank Mullings in Sydney Grew's little flat in Birmingham. A hard, brilliant soprano was also there. She sang confidently, competently, with plenty of intelligence and musicianship. But none of us was in the mood for music. There was upon us all a spirit of undisciplined gaiety which spent itself in ragging, laughter and loud talk. Mullings to me was an unknown stranger, and I accepted him as a good fellow who apparently had not a care in the world. But a little incident occurred that made me devote my observation to all he did and said. . . . He was talking and smiling blandly when, for no apparent reason, he broke off in the middle of a sentence and began to sing like an ecstatic nightingale. One long phrase, it was; it soared up and up, balanced lightly on air, pouring out its full-throated notes with the unpremeditated art of true improvisation. The phrase progressed to its end and lingered, *pianissimo*, on a high note. As soon as the sound had died, Mullings resumed his sentence at the point at which he had broken it, and there came to his lips and eyes the bland smile that, for a few heavenly moments, had vanished. No one took the least notice of this, to me, so startling performance; it was, I gathered, merely Frank's way. But I said to myself:

"Here is a great singer. Some day — soon — he will be famous."

It was not only the voice and the style that had impressed me so deeply: it was also the temperament of the man. He had sung as though he could no longer contain himself, as though to remain silent another instant would be pain, as though he must at that moment and in that place rid himself of the excess of music welling up within him. . . . Does this, to you, sound highfalutin? But it was as I write of it.

Later on I drew Sydney Grew apart.

"Your friend — he is a great artist," I said.

"Frank? Oh yes. A great fellow."

"Will he sing for us?"

"Sure. He'll do anything we ask him."

But, on being invited, Mullings became shy and excused himself. . . . I do not wish to be misunderstood. Mullings must not be charged with unnatural modesty, though he is far from vain. He has (he had then) a fitting knowledge and appreciation of his gifts, but at the time of which I write he was desperately poor and shamefully neglected. I have little doubt his pride suffered. He would not talk of his singing; he disliked his singing to be spoken of by others. I felt this, and so said no word to him of what I thought. . . . But I was overjoyed when, a year or two later, I saw him making his rapid way to the front.

I regard him as one of the greatest personalities — and, in some respects, one of the greatest artists — on the operatic stage. Experts tell me he produces his voice wrongly. I do not know; I do not even greatly care. They say he is destroying his voice. They say that sometimes his voice is unpleasant. (This is true.) They say that you can never be sure that he will not

spoil a song by some unanticipated extravagance. Very well. Quite apart from voice production, no one who has had a training in music will deny that Mullings is an imperfect singer. He does sometimes, as is alleged, emit noises that fall short of beauty. There are occasions on which his dramatic zeal puts too great a strain upon his voice. There have been times when a striking effect has miscarried and the result has been futile. One grants all this: it is sufficiently obvious: but one must be blind to really great imaginative interpretation if one permits these casual defects to occupy the centre of the picture. Mullings has a noble style. He plans his phrases nobly. He will make as rounded and as full a curve as any singer before the public. He lives in the centre of every song he sings; it emanates from him as naturally as breath from a sleeper. The perceptiveness of his imagination is never at fault; no least shade of emotion escapes him. He has warmth and colour in abundance. . . . The academic dry-as-dust will raise his voice and say: "What do these things matter, if his singing is not always perfect?" They matter much. They matter everything. I would rather have an hour of Mullings' singing than a whole year of Melba's.

In the North, where the people have a keen artistic and intellectual life, Mullings is universally hailed as a man of genius. In London, where art is sluggish and music effctely clever, he has not so large and so entirely appreciative a following. . . . I would remind my readers that not very long ago Sir Edward Elgar declared that the musical metropolis of England was "farther north" than London.

I have always found it difficult to interest myself in singers. A voice as a voice leaves me not far from

freezing-point. The instrument is never more than an instrument; used by a child or a fool, it is not even that. But occasionally, by some divine accident, a voice, an intellect and a soul are found in one body. It is then that we get an Ackté or a Mullings. . . . If he had no singing voice at all, Mullings would always be a man of exceptional interest. He has a rich and prodigal personality. Everything about him is large, generous, free. One can imagine him giving himself royally and yet having always something left over still to give.

And the man. Child, artist, genius. . . .

"Lunch with me, Gerald. We'll meet at one in the American Bar."

We met. By a quarter-past one he had collected three other guests. We began food. Someone he knew came into the restaurant. Frank made to him a gesture of invitation; the invited one joined us. Another man entered: he also was drawn in. Then two others, together. Then a fifth and a sixth. And a seventh. Some of us were eating the sweets as an eighth began his soup. At coffee and liqueurs there were nineteen of us. . . . Sir Thomas Beecham joined us. He was in good mood — witty, charming. . . . One does not look at the bill of one's host. £20?

It can have been a surprise to but few people when they learned some four years ago that Sir Thomas Beecham's services to music had resulted in his financial embarrassment. This was not due to the circumstance that he had conducted thousands of operatic performances without payment, but to the circumstance that both in the metropolis and the provinces he had been inadequately supported by the public. This is

our British way of rewarding those who labour for our delight. It has happened before; most assuredly it will happen again. No one feels any particular responsibility, because the matter is everyone's responsibility. Here we have a man who puts his fortune and his genius at the disposal of the public; a man who throughout his career has striven for the highest ideals, who has achieved one artistic triumph after another, who has delved into the literature of music and unfolded treasures that only learned students of the art knew to be in existence, who has disseminated his culture throughout the land, and who has put new life and a strange ardour into a form of art that, before his appearance, was in danger of sinking into vulgarity and decay. Few of us are in a position to estimate the educational benefit that the country as a whole has gained from his work; but there must be thousands who can individually testify that Sir Thomas Beecham has widened their intellectual horizon, refined their perceptions, quickened their imagination, and provided them with abundant æsthetic pleasure. If he had spent himself on the exploitation of "commercial" music, if he had hired out his genius to the highest bidder and been content to make a compromise with his ideals, England, though losing the benefit of his great culture, would have regarded him with the whole-hearted approval inevitably given to the man who seizes the main chance. England understands that kind of conduct. But that a man should devote himself to art and to the education of his generation is the one unbelievable folly, the one unpardonable sin.

But we cannot believe that Sir Thomas Beecham's career will be cut short, though we have no knowledge of how his present difficulties can be surmounted. Such

a spirit as his is not to be daunted, for he believes in his cause and must remain faithful to it whether it succeed financially or no. Every other kind of success is already his. For a long time he must have viewed with equanimity the contempt in which music is held by the vast majority of educated people. That contempt has its roots in the past; it has some kind of historical warrant; but there is no excuse for its survival to-day as a retrogressive and crippling force. Ignorance may be forgiven, but ignorance that is boastful of itself, that seeks to belittle what is noble, is meanly infamous and past forgiveness.

Since the Armistice Miss Ursula Greville has sung much English music in Germany, Austria and Spain. She has sung a great deal of it at home. In quite a short time she has become a striking personality in modern music, for she is vital, daring, brilliant and original. . . . She has enemies; I am very sure she enjoys having them. Life without those who hate us would be savourless. But her enemies pay her the tribute of fear; they smile upon her whom they would rend.

Why should she be hated? Because she is fearless and successful; because she is witty and clever; because she has charm and beauty; most of all, because in whatever company she finds herself she is the dominating figure. Certain women will forgive in their own sex anything save a "success of personality," for it fills them with a gnawing and creeping envy.

It is my great misfortune that I have heard Miss Greville sing only once. At the close of an afternoon vocal recital given by an American lady, Miss Greville gathered a handful of her friends together and took them to her flat for tea. She was pressed to sing. She

looked round the little room apprehensively, for her guests filled it.

"Sing?" she queried. "But one can scarcely breathe."

So we went *en bloc* to a famous music publisher's, where, in a large apartment, we listened to a dozen songs which we were allowed to choose for her. I shall not readily forget that hour. Her voice is not large, but it is extraordinarily flexible; it pierces the true middle of every note; it is full of colour — delicate shades of colour; it is capable of passion and intensity. She has something of the genius of Yvette Guilbert, something of her universality of imagination and emotion.

Every song she gave us was English. Perhaps not one of them was a great song, but all had distinction and originality; all, too, had that note of eagerness that so admirably suits Miss Greville's temperament. One hoped, even as late as last year, that there was to be a renaissance in English song-writing, and more than one publisher did all that was possible to encourage the younger men who, for a brief period, turned to beauty with fresh eyes and ardency of imagination. But the little flood of inspiration trickled to a streamlet, just as the poetry released by the war is now but a faint voice.

But now Miss Greville has left us, though she is on the threshold of a fine career. She has discovered that she has something yet to learn, so she has gone to Milan to study for a year, two years.

CHAPTER XVII

ON MUSICAL CONDUCTORS: ALBERT COATES — SIR
LONDON RONALD — SIR HENRY J. WOOD

IT is often asserted that among the very large number of excellent musicians in our community there are many potential conductors of first-rate powers whose talents lie hidden through lack of opportunity for their exercise and development. In order to conduct there must, it is true, be those who wish to be conducted; without them even a genius must beat the empty air and win no sound. But in this country we have only some half-dozen orchestras that can be regarded as first-rate; there is work, then, for only half-a-dozen men. Who are those half-dozen? Sir Henry J. Wood, Sir Thomas Beecham, Sir Landon Ronald, Mr Albert Coates, Mr Hamilton Harty and, say, Mr Adrian Boult. After them comes a host of younger musicians who like to conduct a big orchestra when they get the chance, but whose chief work lies in other directions — composing, teaching, and so on.

Among these younger men, and even among musicians who have never wielded a baton, there are, we are asked to believe, young interpretative geniuses who will never have a complete opportunity of disclosing that genius. In our musical life there is not room for them. Only large and wealthy cities can continue to keep a full orchestra in existence, for a body of seventy or eighty players is an almost unbelievably expensive organisation. In the whole of Ireland, for example, there is not

even a fairish orchestra; nor is there in Wales. The North of England supports two orchestras, the Midlands another; but in East and West there is nothing. Large towns like Portsmouth, Southampton, Hull, Leeds and Newcastle rely for their orchestral music on very occasional visits from outside organisations. Most of the English towns of a population less than one hundred thousand have never heard even an adequate performance of such familiar works as the Beethoven Fifth, the Tschaikowsky Pathetic, or the Dvorak New World.

It is not merely a question of money. A millionaire might conceivably give a series of orchestral concerts in Portsmouth and charge quite reasonable prices, but would he be able to induce the public to attend them? He would not. The concert-room would not be half full, for Portsmouth knows and cares nothing about classical music. . . . A cultured, eager and enthusiastic public must be waiting to hear music before music can be heard. . . . Again, there are the instrumentalists. Where are they to be obtained? Each member of an orchestra like the London Symphony is a highly trained artist, a musician of some scholarship. Such men are not common, and most of them flock to London. . . . Finally, there is the concert hall. Not many towns possess a room large enough for orchestral music. Those who have attended the Three Choir festivals in Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester will not readily forget the horrid confusion of noise that has filled the little shire halls on Wednesday evenings.

Now anyone can write a novel, and provided it is good (or bad) enough he can get it published without difficulty. It is the same with a play; there are scores of theatres anxious to produce something new.

Sculptors, painters, composers, poets, designers and architects find ready means of placing their work before the public. But the conductor is faced by a blank wall. He cannot even learn his art, for where is the orchestra on which to practise? He may — and probably does — know off by heart fifty modern scores concerning the interpretation of which he has extremely original ideas. But his readings of those scores remain unheard even by himself. . . .

It will seem to the unreflecting that the conductor of innate but inexperienced genius is fated to be frustrated all his life. The principles on which our social and artistic life are constructed appear to rule him out. Simply, he is not wanted. But, as that wonderful fellow, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, so pertinently chants, "All things are not what they seem." Nor is this.

For if, in these days of uncertainty, there is one thing more certain than another, it is that genius will find a way. There accompanies all artistic genius an intense, unquellable and hungry desire for self-expression. It is a kind of lust of the soul. Just as a river, however much it may meander and turn back in the direction of its source, will inevitably reach the sea, so genius, though it be thwarted a thousand times, will in some way find the means for its consummation. A youthful conductor, lacking an orchestra, will organise one of his own; failing that, he will attach himself to a cinema, or restaurant, or provincial theatre; for, if he have the true gift, he will rather conduct a tenth-rate orchestra of a dozen men than play first fiddle in the London Symphony.

I am old enough to have watched at close quarters, and from their beginnings, the careers of two of our

most eminent conductors of the younger generation. With one of these I was on terms of close friendship in his student days. He had great talent and great ambition. At the age of twenty-five, having made a reputation in the provinces as a composer, he came to London with the avowed determination to become a conductor. But he was unknown in the metropolis; he had few friends and no capital; he was doing hack-work of a most soul-destroying kind; his life was as obscure and as unnoticed as that of an ordinary bank clerk; and when he declared to me that before ten years had passed he would be conducting the finest orchestra in the country, his resolve seemed to me as fantastic and as impossible as if he had told me of his intention to become Prime Minister. Yet well within the time he himself had allotted he was conducting *Tristan* and many other operas at Covent Garden under Sir Thomas Beecham's management. . . . He reached Covent Garden by a most devious route, but perhaps no more devious than that forced upon Sir Henry J. Wood and Sir Landon Ronald, though in their cases success was secured in very early youth.

The truth is, men of genius, whether musical, literary or artistic, do not have anything like so hard a time of it as is generally supposed. Two forces are at work to aid them: their own hunger for power and recognition, and the strong desire of men of established position to discover them. The young man of genius can be bought cheaply and exploited easily; for these reasons he is preferred by publishers, impresarios and agents to men who are already famous. The man of reputation asks and gets a fee that is always enormous and sometimes exorbitant; the beginner, no matter how gifted he may be, will sign any contract that seems to offer him a

chance. So that, in these days, there are few (I doubt if there are any) men of genius languishing in undeserved obscurity. Quite a moderate amount of talent will soon win its due meed of recognition.

A conductor, to be immediately successful, must, like all artists who appear in person before the public, not only have personality (all men who succeed have that), but he must possess the kind of personality that is readily communicable — that impinges itself directly upon the mind of the beholder. He must have the appearance of being what he really is. Without exception, all the greatest of our European conductors are men of this kind. Arthur Nikisch, for example, looked a man of genius. His face suggested a brooding melancholy, physical lassitude in conflict with spiritual exultation, profound suffering and disillusionment. He was “picturesque.” Hans Richter was a man of totally different stamp. He showed a Teutonic indifference, rudeness, to his public which, for some obscure reason, his public liked. . . . I remember well an incident at a Hallé Concert in Manchester that revealed vividly his stubborn and ruthless nature. A popular singer had pleased the audience, who insisted on an encore. Richter detested soloists of whatever kind, and nothing enraged him more than for a vocalist or pianist to secure more applause than was given to him and his orchestra. On the occasion in question the singer had reappeared on the platform twice to bow her acknowledgment of the audience’s appreciation, but still the applause went on. Richter, who had been standing by his desk in an attitude that suggested deep moroseness, promptly lost his temper; having stepped on to his little conductor’s platform, he tapped his desk imperiously with his baton, and began the next composition in the

midst of the loud clapping of hands that still continued. The audience, of course, lapsed into immediate silence. Dr Richter had won. Strangely enough, no resentment was felt at this exhibition of execrable manners. The Manchester musical public, the backbone of which was German in origin, seemed, indeed, to like it. It was "old Richter": the tyrant: the Man Who Would Stand No Nonsense. . . . Well, that was one kind of personality. It helped to make Richter's reputation in Germany, but it was largely the cause of his downfall in Manchester.

Of all the conductors now before the public Albert Coates is perhaps the most — what shall I say? — alluring. He wins interest before he has begun to play. His is a tiger-like personality; there is something exotic even in that broad, massive back he turns towards his audience. His gestures are feline; his arms ripple rhythmically. . . . Already famous throughout Europe and America, there is nothing left for him to do but to interpret the strange music, so symptomatic of our time, that has recently been created in Russia — music of which many of us as yet know only half the secret, and of which the mystery seems to foretell what will be the end of the shouting and clamour of our few days.

Three years ago I heard Coates conduct Scriabin's *Poem of Ecstasy* to an audience of seven thousand Welsh miners and their wives at Mountain Ash. One would scarcely expect unsophisticated miners to understand even dimly this hothouse music full of pleasure-pain and cries of gloating, for it was the first draught Wales had tasted of Scriabin's drugged genius. But the long, tortured and intoxicating composition proved more intoxicating than had seemed possible: the huge

Pavilion became filled with a bursting din as soon as the work was over: yells of approval issued from thousands of throats. Coates, warm, debonair and always feline, savoured a triumph that can never have been excelled even in his happiest hours in Petrograd.

It was not long after this Welsh success that Coates took me, one wet and miserable Sunday, along the river in his car. Enemies of his had tried to prejudice me against him. They resented his success in England. One (a lady), allowing her jealous imagination to run riot, declared that he was a Bolshevik and a menace to the peace of the peaceful musical profession. But I found him innocuous enough — a great artist, a simple, good-hearted fellow, and a most excellent companion. I had hoped to hear from him something favourable to the Russian revolutionaries, for at that time I found it difficult to credit all the charges that were being made against them; but he had suffered so much from them in the way of anxiety, physical privation and the loss of worldly goods that he could utter no word that was not tinged with horror and disgust.

It is not perhaps widely known that Coates is an assiduous composer. Naturally, it is the stage that attracts him, and he has written several operas in collaboration with his wife, whose libretti he prefers to any others he has read. But his MSS. are in Russia, and he doubts if he will ever see them again.

"But I shall compose many more operas before I die," he said.

"You're certainly young enough to do anything. But if you're going to America ——"

"Not to settle down. Not that America would matter — I mean I can compose anywhere. And I like

to work ten or twelve hours at a stretch. I don't believe in waiting on inspiration."

"Perhaps you're always inspired?"

"Perhaps never."

"But to create for twelve successive hours! — it's inhuman."

"Yes? I find it refreshing. But then I scarcely know what it is to get really tired."

I remembered this remark that same night when, at a late hour, he was still fresh and talkative while I was aching and longing for bed. . . . There is a kind of wild and untiring energy in most men of genius. The frailest of them appear to have superhuman energy and vitality. But Coates is far from frail. His frame is large and burly, his head is supported by a thick neck, and his limbs have the suppleness and strength of an athlete. . . .

But if the word feline most adequately describes the personality of Coates, in what adjective can one sum up the salient characteristics of Sir Landon Ronald? . . . He escapes easy description: his nature is too diverse to be presented in a single word. A short time ago I heard a lady speak of him as a *charmeur*. He is certainly a *charmeur*. A composer of note once told me that, in his opinion, Ronald had the quickest and most subtle brain of any musician in this country. His brain is certainly subtle and quick. When I asked an orchestral player what was the secret of Ronald's success as a conductor, he replied: "He never wastes time at rehearsals. He knows what he wants; better still, he knows how to get it." . . . The fact of the matter is, Ronald has a real and a very solid intellect. That cannot be said of all eminent musicians — or of all eminent conductors. A conductor, to achieve any

eminence at all, must be more than usually intelligent; but intellectuality is not demanded of him. Behind all Ronald's interpretations of the great classics is a breadth, a delicate adjustment and proportioning of the various parts, a real architectural gift; this gift comes from the intellect rather than from the senses. His readings of Elgar's music are the finest to be heard. (Ernest Newman once told me that Elgar used to wince when he heard his First Symphony conducted by Richter — to whom it was dedicated!) . . . All things considered, it seems to me that Sir Landon Ronald must be regarded our greatest conductor of orchestral, as apart from operatic, music. His musical outlook is universal. His psychology, though abnormally sensitive to beauty, is peculiarly sane. Best of all, he does not exploit and distort other men's music in order to reveal the idiosyncrasies of his own temperament, for his temperament has no noticeable idiosyncrasies.

Sir Henry Wood's conducting I no longer find interesting. All his work is, of course, that of a musician, but it appears to me to have become stereotyped. He always gives you precisely what you expect from him. There is the holding back just before a climax, the over-emphasis of what is already emphasised in the nature of the music itself, the elaborate crossing of t's and dotting of i's. It may be that Sir Henry does not place much faith in the musical intelligence of his listeners; certainly he leaves nothing whatever to their imagination. . . . But he possesses personality. One rather imagines that in his youth he cultivated it. It reaches to the far recesses of the auditorium. For thirty years it has not altered in the least; even his appearance to-day is precisely the same as it was in the last decade of last century. Other men

grow old; some of them even die; but Wood remains unchanged.

I often think that the present generation of music-lovers owes more to Sir Edward Elgar, Ernest Newman and Sir Henry J. Wood than to any twenty, or even fifty, other men. They are in a very great measure responsible for our musical renaissance of the last twenty-five years. Sir Edward Elgar gave our musical life dignity when it stood in sore need of that quality; he was both an example and a rallying-point for our younger men; and the speedy recognition of his genius on the Continent, and more particularly by Germany, helped us to realise that in him we had a figure destined for immortality. Ernest Newman has helped to educate tens of thousands of concert-goers, both by his copious journalistic work and by his magnificent books on Gluck, Wagner and Hugo Wolf. He has clarified our ideas on a subject that, even to intelligent people, is full of difficulty and complexity; he has shown unexampled courage in dangerous situations, and he has evinced a rare fair-mindedness, acuteness and a subtle common-sense throughout a most honourable career. Sir Henry Wood, chiefly by his Promenade Concerts, has also done fine educational work. For many years the man-in-the-street has been able to hear, season by season, the finest classics of the world's musical literature: if any Londoner does not know the nine symphonies of Beethoven through and through, it is because he does not want to know them.

CHAPTER XVIII

MR MASKELYNE — “POY” OF *THE EVENING NEWS* —
EDGAR WALLACE — JOHN CURNOS — THOMAS BURKE
— C. R. W. NEVINSON — WALTER WINANS

MODERN wizards are frequently impressive enough on the stage; behind the scenes they are even as you or I. Who remembers the spiritualistic Griffiths brothers? Some four years ago they were heavily stunted by the Press, and for a week they were famous; but at the end of that week they retired to the mountain fastnesses of South Wales and were heard of no more.

They had startled unsophisticated Welshmen by a trick by no means uncommon, but which was claimed by many spiritualists to prove that Messrs Griffiths possessed supernormal powers. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, if I remember rightly, was deeply and favourably impressed by their — well, performances. One of the brothers — perhaps both — had the power of playing on tambourines and throwing them over the top of a screen when he was (presumably) bound hand, foot, ankle, leg, neck and body to a chair. Other men had done it before without attracting more than mild interest, but the Griffiths brothers came before the public at a time when large numbers of people were half crazy over so-called “spiritualistic” phenomena, and when both men and women were anxious to believe that communication was possible between them and their dear ones who had been slain in the war. Hence

a great and widespread clamour arose when it was told how Messrs Griffiths had seemingly defied one of the laws of Nature.

But Mr Maskelyne was unimpressed. He publicly stated that on a certain date an assistant of his would reproduce all the phenomena associated with the two Welshmen, and that the assistant would do so without "spiritualistic" help: in other words, he would rely solely on his wits and (as I believe) on his powers of muscular expansion. The Griffiths brothers were brought to London by the enterprise of a popular newspaper, and they, with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, were invited to attend the demonstration. Sir Arthur refused the invitation, but the psychic Welshmen accepted it.

Half-an-hour before the performance I found Mr Maskelyne in a state of ill-concealed nerves. There was about him none of the cultivated "manner" of the modern conjurer or showman. On the contrary, he was almost a-twitter with apprehension.

"But why are you nervous?" I asked. "Your man will do the trick all right."

"Yes, I know. I'm not in the least nervous.

Yet he was.

An hour or so later I was on the stage with three other newspaper men. Each of us held a few furlongs of rope. Our willing victim sat in his chair ready for sacrifice. The Griffiths brothers, in the front row of the stalls, looked on smilingly. . . . Whilst in the army I had learned a few useful knots; I proceeded to make at least a score of these, tying the left leg of our victim to a leg of the chair, and winding the rope round and round from ankle to knee; I passed another rope round his waist, carrying the ends of the rope, first behind, then beneath, the chair; I fastened his left

arm to his body, knotting my rope with unusual security. Whilst I was doing all this my three companions were also working with competence and speed. When we had finished, so much rope had been used that little was to be seen of our conjurer; he looked a pathetic object as he sat rigidly still, the only moving part of his body being his eyeballs, which turned this side and that as he examined the crowd across the footlights.

A large screen was then placed entirely round him; at each corner of the screen was stationed a newspaper man in order to provide against any communication between the conjurer and the back of the stage. In less than half-a-minute we heard from within the enclosed screen the idiotic rattle and tinkling of a tambourine; a few seconds later the tambourine was thrown over the screen on to the stage. His coat quickly followed. Another half-minute passed: the conjurer called out "Right!": the screen was removed. We saw what we had been told we should see. He sat in his chair apparently roped as he had been a minute previously; but whereas he had worn his coat when we had secured him to the chair, he was now in his shirt-sleeves. . . . Sensation. Mr Maskelyne's man had done precisely what the much-advertised Griffiths brothers had done. "And without the aid of spirits or a medium," explained Mr Maskelyne, adding with the utmost candour: "Just a clever trick."

I felt that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle had acted wisely in staying away.

How was it done? I do not claim to be more observant than the next man, but, being on the stage in close proximity to the conjurer, I was better placed for observation than most of the onlookers. I noticed that

when the screen was withdrawn the conjurer, previously quite cool, was now covered with perspiration. Moreover, when we were roping him, he continually made gasping noises as though he were in great suffering; at first I thought we were hurting him with our ropes, which we drew pretty tightly into his flesh; but as he made no protest I felt that this could not be the cause of his peculiar exclamatory noises. So I examined him carefully. His slim, muscular body was palpably under terrific strain — a strain entirely self-imposed. His lungs were filled with air to their utmost capacity; his muscles stood out hard, swollen and taut; his body, indeed, seemed to me almost half as big again as it was before we had begun the roping. Occasionally he would expel the air from his lungs, fill them again with enormous rapidity, and hold his breath; it was at such times that he emitted the distressing, strained sounds I have spoken of. I have no doubt that as soon as the screen was placed around him he emptied his lungs, relaxed every muscle of his body, and wriggled his arms, head and trunk from the network of rope we had wound and knotted round him. . . . Extremely clever, of course; but nothing in the least degree mysterious. But spiritualists seek the mysterious; abnormal explanations of strange phenomena are to them much more welcome than explanations of a normal kind; they believe what they want to believe.

When the performance was over, those of us who had assisted on the stage were entertained by Mr Maskelyne to refreshments. Over a bottle of champagne I propounded to him my theory concerning "how it was done." He listened gravely and patiently, as though he were hearing for the first time an entirely new explanation of an old trick.

"Very ingenious, Mr Cumberland," he said when I had finished.

"But that was how it was done, wasn't it?" I pressed him.

"I wonder," said he; "I really do wonder."

And that being all I could get out of him, I sought the conjurer himself. I offered him a strong glass of whisky, hoping it would loosen his tongue. But he had met inquiring men before, and I found myself up against a well-simulated mass of stupidity. So stupid, indeed, did he pretend to be that he understood none of my questions. Invariably he replied to a question I had never asked. And, at the earliest possible moment, he departed from my company.

This incident was the last of a series of investigations I have made from time to time with so-called spiritualistic phenomena. Twenty years ago I engaged various mediums week by week and submitted them to ordinary test conditions; but never on any occasion did I meet with any phenomenon that could not be explained by trickery or thought transference. And I am by no means sure that so-called thought transference is not a clever swindle from beginning to end.

In private life that brilliant cartoonist, "Poy" of *The Evening News* and *Daily Mail*, is known as P. H. Fearon. I have met him only once, and then I was in his company for only a few minutes, though I had the advantage of seeing him in his own flat in Artillery Mansions. . . . "What is he like?"—that is the question one is always asked about well-known people. But all men who express themselves in any artistic medium are like their work. Still, the resemblance may not be apparent. It is not apparent in the case of

Poy. To strangers he wears a mask. His cartoons are whimsical, taunting, derisive. But all that side of his nature is kept out of sight of the casual acquaintance.

All artists who work on a daily paper sooner or later shed any innate Bohemianism they may possess. Gradually they are disciplined into regular habits. They must supply at least one idea a day, and that idea must be presented with definiteness, freshness and force; by a certain hour it must be delivered; it must reveal no sign of haste or weariness. . . . In short, no newspaper artist can live the life of Chelsea, where work, though often admirable and not infrequently inspired, is generally casual. So that Poy is wise in his choice of a habitat; in Victoria Street he is far removed from the society of those disturbing and disintegrating people who, when overtaken by a mood of idleness, insist that all those within calling distance shall be idle too.

But I do not suppose Fearon was ever called upon to curb and discipline an unruly temperament. His appearance, manner and speech have a soothing quietness and orderliness. He has no “picturesque” eccentricities. But what one does notice about him is an unusual sensitiveness and alertness. I do not mean that his movements are quick and decisive, but that the rapidity and exactness of his mind enable him to grasp at once the precise shade of meaning you wish to give your words. I cannot conceive him misunderstanding anyone. . . . He has natural dignity of mind, considerable reserve, and much strength and tenacity of character.

Edgar Wallace has the reputation of being the most productive writer in London: this implies a good deal,

for London is a city of productive writers. He is certainly extraordinarily versatile, and there are few sides of life he has not studied. And, on occasion, he is a terrific worker.

But what *is* a productive writer? There are two hundred and eighty books, some of them of great length, bearing the name of Alexandre Dumas *père*; but it is known that he had at least ninety collaborators, all of whom, to quote Henley, he "exhausted," and in his collected works is included more than one volume of which he wrote no single word. . . . You know the charming anecdote of Dumas *père* and Dumas *fils*? Said father to son: "Have you read my latest book?" "Not yet," replied son to father; "have you?" . . . Still, Dumas stands as the most productive writer known to history. But I doubt if he wrote more than a thousand words a day — say three pages of the present book. And that is precisely the amount turned out by the late Nat Gould from year's beginning to year's end — turned out, one imagines, without trouble, without thought, without any pricking of artistic conscience. Jack London, in his periods of work, also wrote a thousand words a day — no fewer, no more, and, like most honest writers, he hated the grind and grief of his work. Anthony Trollope contrived a couple of thousand, but there were many periods in which he wrote little or nothing. . . .

I doubt if Edgar Wallace averages much more than a thousand words a day, though in times of pressure of work and great fecundity of ideas he may write ten times that amount. But the quality of his work is infinitely better than that of Nat Gould. It bristles with cleverness — cleverness of plot, of subsidiary idea, of style, of phrase, of thought. I do not think I have

come across a single paragraph of his that is not full of "meat."

I have met Wallace twice, but I do not suppose he remembers either occasion; indeed I am not sure that he was aware of my identity. Once was during the performance of a new show of de Courville's some part of which was the product of Wallace's pen. The revue — I suppose it was a revue — was not doing very well, and Wallace was preoccupied to the point of rudeness. On the second occasion, in the early days of the war, I called on him, on behalf of a friend, in answer to an advertisement of Wallace's for a shorthand typist. At that time he occupied offices in the Strand, and he was in the mood to dictate a novel or two. I found him buoyant, incisive, masterful and persuasive.

"I must make some money," said he, "for hard times are before us. So I'm going to write a few stories. I want at least two typists."

"You can keep two occupied?"

"Easily. More, if necessary. But I must have experts. Is your friend an expert?"

"I'm afraid not. Her typing is excellent, but her shorthand is only so-so."

"Sorry. She won't do. . . . I'm a busy man," he added meaningly.

So I turned to go.

"Thanks for calling all the same," he added. "By the way, what sort of stories do you find people are reading nowadays?"

"All sorts. But they'll want stories of adventure now — the kind you can write so well."

"Thanks. Good stories?"

"Yes. They'll want them good — or very bad. It

doesn't matter which, it seems to me. If you write a really distinguished yarn, you'll reach only the high-brows. And there aren't many high-brows."

"But it takes a very clever man to write for the groundlings."

"Yes. Or a damned fool."

"That's what I meant."

As I left him he began to stride about his office, so deep in thought that he made no return to my spoken farewell.

The name of John Cournos is becoming more than a distant rumour; in a short time (not often do I prophesy, but I prophesy now) it will be on the lips of all who care for literature that is strange and adventurous. He has genius; his work disturbs one like a quickening. By the time this appears in print he will have published three novels. The first two have had no sale. You would be surprised if you knew the small effect that magnificent (if isolated) reviews have on the sale of a book. Indeed, they have no effect that can be appreciated by the publisher. Cournos has had magnificent reviews. But he has had only a few hundred readers.

It was in 1913 that Ernest Marriott, that indefatigable explorer of humanity, brought John Cournos to see me. Cournos had recently arrived in London from America, his knowledge of our language was imperfect, and he was both poor and obscure. But he quickly made friends, though none of them could be of service to him, for though Cournos had begun to write, was unusually ambitious, and had unlimited but not assertive self-confidence, his mind was as yet unformed, and his ideas — or so it seemed to me — were chaotic and crude. He had, I think, passed through much

suffering. I found him a little querulous. He had, it appeared, written to H. G. Wells in a tone of hero-worship and, if I remember rightly, Wells had been kind enough to grant him an interview. But his reception of his young disciple was not of the nature that Cournos had anticipated, and he complained to me that one so powerful as Wells should not be willing to help him.

"But he is helping you," I suggested.

"How? What do you mean?"

"His books are. They have helped you."

"Yes."

"Well. Isn't that enough? After all, what claim have you on him and his time and thought?"

"Oh — *claim*! I've no claim. Oh no — no one has any claim on anyone!"

"If they had, they wouldn't make it. At least I hope they wouldn't."

"Very well, Cumberland. If that is your view — well, that is your view."

"It should, I think, be yours. You've only got to produce good work and you'll find plenty of admirers. You won't want Wells's help then."

"But his encouragement?"

"Ah, I see. It is his encouragement you want. You don't really, Cournos. You know your own powers. You know what you can do; you don't require any Wells to tell you that. Perhaps you want flattery. All of us beginners do. But it's dreadfully bad for us. And Wells isn't a flatterer. Besides, do you realise that half the unfledged writers in this country are always bombarding Wells? If he were to listen to every appeal, he would have to engage half-a-dozen secretaries and abandon his own work."

Cournos turned from me in annoyance. I felt for him more sympathy than I expressed, for I understood well enough that reaching out of the spirit for the sympathy of those we admire. At different periods I have suffered keenly from the knowledge that the men for whose work I felt a kind of idolatry have been totally indifferent to my own writings. The suffering, I am persuaded, is caused by no means entirely by wounded vanity. . . . Less than three years ago I sent a copy of my first novel to Bernard Shaw. I did so because I knew I had written a tragic piece of work, and I feared it would escape serious attention through prejudice engendered by my *Set Down in Malice*. I asked for an interview. "I conclude you want to play some silly trick on me," Shaw wrote, "and then publish an account of how you took the poor old man in." I may have deserved that: but it was like a knife-stab. . . . Again, I sent a copy of a book of my short stories to Joseph Conrad. I obeyed a blind impulse, not stopping to analyse the motives that prompted me, but feeling a deep craving for the approval of a great and fine spirit. Conrad was kinder than Shaw. At the conclusion of a long letter he wrote: "When, after finishing *Almayer's Folly*, I hesitated at the parting of the ways, not at all from literary ambition but because of the strong hold my old life had still on me, I admit that it was Edward Garnett who tipped the balance. His words were: 'You have the style, you have the temperament. Why not write another?' You will observe that he said nothing about the pursuit of literature — whatever that may mean. He simply said — 'Why not write another?' And I verily believe that I can do no better than pass on these words to you." . . . All writers who are feeling their way

painfully and with much self-distrust, towards the very core of their talent will understand my feeling of pride at receiving so kindly a message.

But Cournos, who has laboured hard and courageously, has now no need of the support of the good opinion of any particular men. Sooner or later his strange and great gifts will place him very high among our modern writers.

Thomas Burke is a pale, self-contained man who, though success has touched him with a large and caressing hand, remains dissatisfied and expectant. Daintily eating a sandwich, he gave me his views on authors, agents and publishers. Those views were not mine. I find it difficult to believe that publishers are scoundrels when all my experience proves the opposite. Every author should learn that a publisher is a man of business, not a philanthropist, but no doubt Burke has come to a realisation of the obvious truth by now.

His mind is sharp and thin. It works like a stiletto, probingly. It has a strange tenacity. . . . No, it is not like a stiletto. Rather does it resemble a powerful acid that eats its way through the trappings and masks of life until it reaches — and dissolves — the true metal. He is not a brilliant, or even a good, talker. One feels that the work is bigger than the man — but then one feels that with almost all artists.

Burke's is a lonely spirit. He would not be otherwise than lonely. He observes life at close quarters, but he is careful not to allow life to touch him too nearly. For he distrusts his kind — distrusts the appearances of things, the obvious (but often true) motive, the quick camaraderie of easy spirits. He walks delicately, not because he is fastidious, but

because hidden in the undergrowth of life are gins and snares.

Quick success — success in early youth — is always a handicap. It has weighed heavily on C. R. W. Nevinson. During the war he became famous by bringing a clear eye and an untarnished imagination to the presentation of the horror, pity, courage and drabness of mankind under the scourge of that world-affliction which, to some sentimental minds, is already covered with the glamour of romance. Nevinson's trench pictures are for posterity. To-day they are disregarded because we would forget the things they tell us. They are for posterity because they are true — spiritually true.

In those days Nevinson was something of a rebel. When first I came across him, in the early months of 1919, he was, however, already trimming his sails to catch more prosperous breezes. Rebellion is a poor game for a man of real talent, and Nevinson was quick to see that the labels the newspapers and the public were attaching to his name were not of the kind that stick. He had abundant self-confidence, but he was tired of flouting the Philistines. Self-confident? One might use a harsher term for that flamboyant and not too intelligible speech he delivered at the dinner some of his admirers gave in his honour on the eve of his departure for America. It was a clever, muddled, conceited harangue which must have been regretted by all who had his interests at heart. But it was delivered without a single doubt, or a moment's hesitancy, or even the first faint fluttering of a qualm.

Self-doubt can, of course, be carried to excess; in moderation, it is a fine purge. And when Nevinson

begins to doubt himself he will step on the road of his greatest success.

He has views about everything: final views delivered with immense cocksureness. I have heard him dismiss the sociological and political writing of Wells and Arnold Bennett as "amateur thinking." Yet he himself is by no means a correct thinker. His aggressive, somewhat dictatorial manner reminds one of a kind of Frank Harris without a tithe of Frank Harris's brains. He has been well advertised by his friends: no other artist save Augustus John, who is honestly and honourably indifferent to both adulation and detraction, has been so constantly paragraphed as Nevinson.

He has personality, full-flavoured and strong. And he is a mighty worker. For myself, I admire immensely the artist or writer who begins his work each day at the same hour with the regularity of a bank clerk, and continues it unflaggingly through the four, six or eight hours he has set himself. That is the method pursued by Nevinson when there is sufficient daylight. In the evenings he talks in the Café Royal. But in these days there is no talk in the Café Royal that is worth listening to. The gaudy place has pleasant associations for many of us, but it has lost its old spirit of ten years ago — its casualness, its brilliance, its unforced Bohemianism.

There is a good deal of the visionary in Nevinson. He has the eyes of a mystic. He has sought beauty in strange places and has found loveliness where other men have seen but drabness and dust. But he lacks the psychologist's gift. The individual man or woman does not interest him. His mind is obsessed by the strange driving forces of human nature, the blind

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mass-forces that lure the world on to cruelty, to devotion, to self-immolation, to self-aggrandisement. One hesitates to use the much-abused word "cosmic": it was applied to many peculiar fowl before the war: but it best describes Nevinson's passion, half-conscious and as yet hesitant and fumbling, for the good and evil spiritual forces in whose grip humanity is held.

Only yesterday it seems that, as I stood in the hall of Surrenden Park, Walter Winans, short, ugly, but bearing himself with an air of distinction, put his hand about my elbow and guided me gently to a room whose furniture, as I remember it, consisted solely of a table laden with every imaginable kind of drink.

A magnificent creature with "fair, round belly" waited anxiously to learn my choice. It was a hot summer morning, and I drank from a cut-glass tumbler against whose sides spiky ice clicked deliciously.

Winans regarded me solemnly and, the drink finished, said: "The first drink is good, but I have heard the second is still better."

I made a weak and, I was glad to observe, ineffective protest.

"You are fond of horses?" he asked.

At that moment I was ready to be fond of anything, though, truth to tell, I am no fonder of a horse than I am of a cow or a bullfinch.

"Very," said I, with astounding conviction.

So he took me to the stables and we went from stall to stall for a long hour, during which we inspected thirty or forty clean-limbed, fine-crested brutes bred for speed and stamina.

He talked a good deal in an ejaculatory kind of way, but I did not listen: I was occupied in studying this

very singular man whose horsey face, with its broad upper lip, its gaping nostrils, and keen, pouch-enveloped eyes told nothing of the delicate, sensitive artist's brain that functioned ceaselessly within his heavy skull.

But suddenly I was called to attention by discovering that I was the object of a lecture on the subject of the docking of horses' tails.

"It's criminal — cruelly criminal!" he said in his mild, detached way. "Brainless people imagine that the appearance of a horse is improved by cutting its tail off. You might as reasonably 'prettify' a lion by depriving it of its mane or an elephant by slicing off its ears.

"These cutting and pruning people ought to be kept, stark naked and handcuffed, for a couple of hours near a heap of manure; they'd soon discover what it is to be tortured by flies."

Though his words were violent, his manner did not suggest that his emotions had been stirred in the least. I have used the word "detached," but perhaps "shy" or even "bored" describes him better.

We returned, by no means hurriedly, to the house, where fifteen or twenty other guests had in the meantime assembled.

That lunch remains in my mind as a prolonged exasperation. The room was full of ponderous, elderly footmen, who, horribly distant in manner, seemed to imagine that, whatever their duties in life might be, it was certainly not their business to wait upon us. True, a wing, with slow deliberation, was placed in front of me at some period of the meal, and I distinctly saw a lady hungrily depriving a peach of its stone.

But some unknown power prevented the dishes on

the sideboard from reaching the table. Walter Winans, the least conspicuous person present, lost all his importance. More detached than ever, he seemed submerged in introspection, and towards three o'clock we rose, having lunched off champagne and the delicious odour of curried prawns.

Though I know nothing of horses, I think I know something of sculpture and painting, and it was with the desire to see some of his own work that I enticed Winans into a room through whose open door I saw a multitudinous array of paintings, pieces of sculpture, and *objets d'art*. I chose a head almost at random.

"That," said I, "is very beautiful."

"Yes?" he asked, and waited.

"Extraordinarily beautiful," I went on. "There is something almost Rodinesque in its breadth of style, its subtle imaginativeness. Is it by an Englishman?"

"No; an American. It is my own work."

I had guessed as much, and I had hoped that he would, as all men do, thaw under flattery even when it is obviously insincere. But if he was pleased he did not show it, not even by that betraying, reluctant smile that few men can wholly conceal when their vanity is warmed.

But he showed me other work of his, and it was a sculpture of a horse that reminded him that he wished to give us an exhibition of driving on his private trotting track. Here he conducted himself with that same air of aloofness, of a man performing a familiar task with almost mechanical precision. He stepped into his sulky, flashed past us, and stepped out again. Into the *troïka* he took a companion, and in half-a-minute his three horses, running abreast, had disappeared from view. He spoke little but did much.

Late that afternoon, as I bade him farewell, I felt that I had been in the presence of a man about whom I knew less than I did before I met him. He was a writer of books, a sculptor, a painter, a breeder of horses, a passionate hater of cruelty, a famous marksman, a terrific worker, a man who had seen the world and known its people. But little or nothing of all this had he shown me; nothing of all this could I detect or get even a hint of.

A strange man: an eccentric man: a man who, I cannot help but think, had experienced much unhappiness and wretchedness of mind. And yet, when everything is said, he will remain for long in the memory of the public as a man devoted heart and soul to sport, to beauty and to gentleness.

CHAPTER XIX

A SHEAF OF LITERARY STUDIES: SIR ARTHUR QUILLER-
COUCH — SIR HENRY NEWBOLT — JOHN GALSWORTHY —
F. W. H. MYERS — T. S. ELIOT

NOT yet, in spite of centuries of disputation, is there agreement, or even the basis for an agreement, among men of learning as to the nature of education, or its purpose, or how best it may be come by. Pedant and humanist, here and there, at one time or another, seek conflict the one with the other, but, struggling as they do for the most part on different planes of thought, rarely join issue. It is not difficult to imagine one of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's "fork-bearded professors" reading his book, *On the Art of Reading*, with the baffled vision and bewildered anger of a mole, long underground, brought unexpectedly into full sunlight. He would, one feels, be conscious of something bright and piercing and unusual; but to him the brightness would bring no illumination, and the piercing, revealing quality of these eloquent chapters would uncomfortably dazzle his purblind eyes. It is the old conflict between the letter and the spirit: the quarrel between those to whom facts are everything and those who employ them to give strength to the wings of the spirit.

Sir Arthur's book, so splendid in its courage, so confident in its wisdom, is by no means free from satire of the "fork-bearded" ones, for it was written during a period when he and a few friends were fighting

sturdily and implacably to establish the present English Tripas at Cambridge; indeed, when preparing his twelve lectures for the Press, he feared they might prove too occasional and disputatious if issued in book form. Happily, this is not so. His satirical sallies give point to his argument; they quicken his wit and drive home his points. One hopes these barbed darts will penetrate the hide of the learned gentleman who, in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, wrote that the authors of the various books of the Bible were "highly gifted individuals," and will descend quickly to that place where dwells the shade of Frederic Paley, who, in translating the VIIIth Isthmian of Pindar, wrote, among much other nonsense, "But as we have ceased from our tiresome troubles, we will publicly indulge in a sweet roundelay."

But the conflict is not yet over, though a notable victory has been won. That the youth of Cambridge should be taught literature as an illuminator of life, as a living part of our existence, and as a revealer to them of the spirit of man during his few brief days, is no doubt a fine achievement; but, as Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch points out, the real battle for English lies in our Elementary Schools, and in the training of our elementary teachers. "My thoughts have too often strayed from my audience in a University theatre away to remote rural classrooms where the hungry sheep look up and are not fed; to piteous groups of urchins standing at attention and chanting *The Wreck of the Hesperus* in unison." Being tied to the place and the occasion, he has to these, he declares, brought no real help. That, no doubt, is true if by "real" he means "immediate" help. But a book like this is a growing power. Its ideas will filter through channels

unguessed at by its author; its arguments will win over those whose attitude towards literature has not as yet hardened to academic hostility; and many an obscured mind, working its way towards the light, will in these pages find that illumination which is the natural inheritance of the poetic and of the imaginative. It has recently been maintained that our children receive the kind of education best fitted to prepare them for life in their native country. But what kind of "life"? Life under the domination of Mr Sidney Webb? Life ruled and disordered by Mr George Lansbury? It is because many of us wish life to be full, dignified and penetrated throughout by beauty that we would throw open to all "that proud park and rolling estate" of English literature. Most of all would we admit those men whom even great knowledge has failed to educate — "men of extreme learning who yet are, some of them, uncouth in conduct, others violent and overbearing in converse, others unfair in controversy, others even unscrupulous in action."

Throughout his twelve lectures Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch insists on the importance of Browning's *What Is* rather than on *What Knows* and *What Does*. *What Is* is the spiritual element in man, and he maintains that nine-tenths of what is worthy to be called literature is concerned with this spiritual element. It is here that many readers will part company with him, for he supplies no definition of what is meant by the term "spiritual element," though it is clear from later lectures that he interprets that expression in its widest possible sense. Yet I doubt, though perhaps unjustly, if he would include the writings of Flaubert or Mr George Moore among the "nine-tenths" of literature devoted to the spiritual element in human nature,

though so soaring a piece of ingenious syntax as Francis Thompson's *Hound of Heaven* is to be found among his haphazard lists of "great books." It is obvious that choice of subject material is not one of the criteria of great literature. Nor do earnestness of purpose, reverence for truth and a conquering patience serve at all, if "the fire of God" be absent. Darwin's *Descent of Man*, we are told, is a "great book": it is certainly occupied with a great subject; but to our mind it contains no chapter, no page, that is lit by genius, no paragraph bearing the sign of a fine spirit attempting to express in noble terms any part, however small, of the destiny of man in the grip of fate.

It would seem that to Sir Arthur all great literature is born from the effort, conscious or unconscious, of the spirit of man to reconcile itself with the harmony of the Universe: man, the microcosm, is always a-strain to merge himself in, and be one with, the Universe, the macrocosm. The "inward soul" is, in Shakespeare, "the fire of God"; in lesser men it is "the little spark" which, we are assured, is common to the king, the sage, the poorest child. I feel in reading the chapter "Apprehension *v.* Comprehension," where this thesis is set forth with fine eloquence, that Sir Arthur has swallowed the camel, while many of us are yet straining at the gnat. And, truly, he does not dive down to essentials: he does not define his terms: he does not disclose the metaphysical rock upon which his assumptions are erected. "I preach to you": those are his words. It is a noble preachment — noble, that is, in intention — and, as a workable theory, his microcosm-macrocosm doctrine has its usefulness. But for me it does not explain all the facts; rather, in-

deed, is it directly antagonistic to many of them. Too often, for Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's theory, has the spirit of man shown itself hostile to the Universal Harmony; too often has that harmony seemed an ironic mockery. The crashing, triumphant discords of Wagner, of Nietzsche and of Thomas Hardy are a naked flouting of the serene, accepting mysticism of Traherne — "You never enjoy the world aright till the sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens and crowned with the stars." Defiance of man towards his destiny may to the cynic appear as ineffectual as the bewildered anger of a cornered rat; but it shines brightly in our modern literature, and in so far as it is unconquerable, it has that much of nobility.

This "fire of God," this "spark," we are told, is easily quenched; it is frail, tender, sometimes easily tired; to nurse it, "to mother it, in short, as wise mothers do their children, is what I mean by the Art of Reading." I could wish for more verbal happiness in defining what is meant by "fire" and "spark"; but it is "yet undefined — call it soul — it wants no less a name." To me there is something artificial in the view that the "soul" of man is to be kept burning brightly by direct contact with literature. From his daily experience, every man is aware that even he who is illiterate may have a soul as noble as the greatest scholar of them all. Literature, after all, is only life at second-hand. It is from the striving fire and undying energy of man himself that the soul of man keeps alight. To be ennobled by a piece of great literature is an unforgettable experience; but to be ennobled by the contemplation of a fine deed, to have for friend a man whose pathway through life is lit by unselfishness

and his own quiet worth, is to drink from the fount of divinity itself.

When a poet sets out to provide "a scientific explanation of the facts concerning poetry," he may be pretty sure that most of his fellow-craftsmen will examine with some care what he has to say, but will inevitably turn away from that explanation with a careless shrug of the shoulders. As Sir Henry Newbolt points out in *A New Study of English Poetry*, Bacon long ago observed that while Science is a subjecting of the mind to things, Art is a subjecting of things to the mind: the scientist is life's servant, the artist is life's lord. And the artist, with his innate and often fine arrogance, will always reject "scientific explanations," both of his craft and of himself, for he knows that behind all the phenomena that represent him and his art is the incommunicable secret — the ineluctable mystery the very existence of which is unsuspected by half the world.

Sir Henry Newbolt's professed attitude towards poetry is democratic: he would drag us all in and, by widening his definition of the art, he succeeds in doing so. "Poetry," he says, "is the expression in human language of our intuitions: prose is the expression of our judgments." Therefore we are all poets; and, indeed, Sir Henry declares that, whenever we express our perceptions in words, "we are in the literal sense making poetry." What we may call "generous" definitions almost invariably land us in a quagmire of this kind; but of course Sir Henry is as fully aware of the existence of the quagmire as is the reader; so, without pause, he adds: "But this we do not dignify by the name of poetry: we reserve that title for creations more distinguished." But even this, he feels,

is inadequate, and, indeed, the scientifically trained reader may well look askance at words like "creations" and "distinguished," and inquire precisely what significance is to be given to them. "Good poetry, poetry in the full sense of the word, is the masterly expression of rare, difficult and complex states of consciousness, of intuitions in which the highest thought is fused with simple perceptions, until both together become a new emotion." So, after all, we do not all "make poetry." No wonder that in another place he is compelled to confess that "poetry is a vague term"; the term, indeed, is so vague that no definition of it will satisfy everyone. Sir Henry Newbolt, it seems to us, is forced by his own arguments, but against his will, from the democratic to the aristocratic point of view of art; for almost every word he employs in his final definition of poetry separates the creator of that poetry from his fellows. In truth, complete understanding of a great poet is reserved for the very few. The liking that the large public has for Shakespeare is merely an almost physical enjoyment of his colour and warmth; they rarely hear the beating of his spirit's wings.

Both at the beginning and the end of his volume Sir Henry insists that the criterion of great poetry is that it "touches the universal longing for a perfect world." But *is* that longing universal? Most men, no doubt, are in conflict with the world, and, at their best, are fighting for some perhaps unattainable ideal; but the glamour and excitement and passion of life do not lie in longings for perfection, but in the hazards of the great game, in the steely thrust of thought, and in the turmoil and shouting of our few days. We agree that life wounds, and that in the hearts of all men

there is, in their less secure moments, a desire for reconciliation with the world. Yet in spite of this we find that our greatest poets are intoxicated with life, and though the "murmur of man's unrest" may be ceaseless, still poetry and beauty themselves are the very children of that unrest and would disappear at "perfection's" approach. Perfection may be the dream of the philosopher, but to the poet it would bring the fullness of satiety. I conjecture that the "longing" Sir Henry detects in much of our great poetry is not the longing for a perfect world, but the desire to make use of what is beyond our scope, to see what is beyond sight, and to grasp realities that, though immanent, are a million worlds away.

The reader must not infer from what has been written that this book is a metaphysical disquisition on the nature of poetry: it is far from being that. The dozen papers embrace such widely varied subjects as Chaucer, British Ballads, Poetry and Education, Poetry and Politics, John Milton, and the Poet and his Audience. In all of these there is much that is wisely thought and finely said. The last-named essay completely shatters the theory that the poet writes for himself and himself alone. It is a common affectation in these days for a writer — he is almost invariably an unsuccessful writer — to profess indifference with regard to the manner in which his work is received by the public. "I have written to please myself," he declares; "if the public likes it, I am satisfied. On the other hand, if the public does not like it, I am equally satisfied." Now, though the writer may deceive his friends, he can never deceive himself. It is true, of course, as Sir Henry points out, that artistic expression is for the artist an end in itself, but the joyful labour

of externalising his intuitions — “making a visible work of art” — inevitably presupposes an audience. If the book is unread, it is, as Goethe said, “shrivelled up and worth nothing,” and so it remains until “it has again been taken up into life, been again felt and thought.” There is something ghastly in the thought of a poet writing book after book for his own eyes alone, gloating over his own work, continually responding to his own thoughts and emotions, heedless of his fellows. Such a form of self-indulgence is of the kind of which only a monomaniac could be guilty. Equally unpleasant is the conception of a poet who consistently destroys his work as soon as finished for fear others should share his pleasure. Sir Henry imagines the man who protests that he “writes for himself” placed upon a solitary island, well supplied with all the necessities of life, but with no present or potential audience, and with “the whole social life of man . . . blotted from his consciousness.” Would such a man set down his dreams and visions? It is inconceivable that he would. One may not concur with Dr Johnson that the prime motive of the writers is that of earning money, but it is certain that one of their chief desires is to establish personal relations with numbers of their fellow-men.

It is a matter for regret that this fine book should include the essay on “Futurism and Form in Poetry,” and perhaps it would not have been included if the author had not been over-anxious to argue against “academic and scholastic authority.” We would rather endure the oppression of dry scholasticism than the oppressiveness of Mr Marinetti’s *Café Royal* caperings, but even in these days, when the *outré* in art and poetry is all that appears to be understood by the

younger generation, Sir Henry can find it in his heart to repeat that he admires the glib Marinetti of 1914, for "his courage and his brilliant talents" and that he feels gratitude "for the light which he has flashed . . . upon our own problems, the future of our own poetry." Most of those who welcomed Marinetti eight years ago have now forsaken him, having sought and found new gods: he is distressfully *démodé*. But the futuristic fashion persists and Sir Henry Newbolt has the satisfaction every month — nay, every week — of witnessing the falsification of his statement that "the English poet, the English painter, knows by long experience that, if his intuition takes an unfamiliar form, it will be received with indifference or hostility." Whatever amount of truth lay in this assertion eight or nine years ago, it is certain no truth is contained in it now. This is the hour of the young man who mistakes cocksureness for knowledge and eccentricity for originality; his "intuition" assumes a hundred different forms, and the more different they appear to be, the more are they essentially the same.

Forsyteism is not yet dead; indeed it will never die so long as human nature is what it always has been. It stands for the possessive instinct, narrowness, fear of publicity, meanness, sleekness, imperviousness to new ideas. In Ancient Rome Forsyteism had its standard-bearers, and even in Athens there were those who lolled (spiritually) on mahogany sofas and filled their bookcases with volumes that were never opened. Xanthippe herself might well have been the daughter of Soames Forsyte if, instead of Annette of Soho, he had chosen a wife from his own milieu. Soames! — it is a happily chosen but an unhappily significant name, and in the

dubious realm of modern fiction we have met few men so spiritually arid, so physically and mentally repellent.

We do not ask imaginative writers to devote their talents exclusively to the portrayal of pleasant people, for though Hamlet, Becky Sharp, Mr Mantalini and the lady of whom Madame Héger was the prototype are fascinating and absorbingly interesting creatures, they are scarcely pleasant; but we feel it right to protest when we discover an author absorbed and re-absorbed in a particularly disagreeable type of human nature. Almost, it would seem, Mr Galsworthy believes that Forsyteism, with its unimaginative lust for possession, represents England, or, at all events, the England of the early years of this century. He would expose us all. We are not precisely wicked: we are worse, for we are stupid and greedy. No censor, however, could be more circumspect. Never a direct condemnation; not a single point driven home; not for one instant does this gentle suave voice thunder in indignation; even the word "damn" (rarely used) is printed "d——n." Nor is Mr Galsworthy so vulgar as to hint, or even to employ innuendo.

His indictment, if so it may be called, is shadowy, pervasive, indirect. His method here is in direct opposition to that he invariably employs when striving to enlist the sympathy of the reader on behalf of a losing cause or a persecuted individual. In the latter case, no method is too clumsy, no means too extreme, to be employed in heaping suffering and obloquy upon the tortured object of his admiration; he will wring our tears, even if in order to do so he has to flay his hero alive. But in *In Chancery* he attacks, and his offensive methods evince more subtlety than the methods employed when he is impelled to defend.

Defending, he is a chevalier in hysterics; attacking, he is a Machiavelli *in petto*. Indeed so secret is his onslaught that one is left in doubt as to whether, after all, there has been any onslaught.

If Soames is his chief victim — and most of the characters of *In Chancery* are the brooding victims of Mr Galsworthy's remote wrath — Soames's father, James, is the most free from literary victimisation. Here is an old man drawn with skill, without prejudice, and with that untiring care which is this author's chief asset as a craftsman. Irene, Soames's first wife, is to be found in nearly all Mr Galsworthy's stories; there is always something left unexplained in his "heroic" women; they are presented, as though observed from the outside, without intuition, without real understanding. Their conduct, whether right or wrong, has a certain ruthless magnificence; the pity is, they do not live. Fineness of nature, steel-like honesty combined with true passion, is the most difficult of all qualities for the novelist to present, and Mr Galsworthy's very definite limitations are exposed each time he attempts to create the Meredithian woman.

One feels that to Mr Galsworthy life is an enormous ganglion upon which he executes one neurotomy after another. Hugo Wolf eyed Brahms with suspicion because the latter in his music could not exult, and for the same reason our appreciation of Mr Galsworthy's work is limited. Life obsesses him, but it does not gladden him. It seems to us that for him our little world is a sick man tossing feverishly upon his bed; Mr Galsworthy, finger on pulse and clinical thermometer in hand, sits patiently by his side, recording the slow sinking towards dissolution.

For many years Mr Galsworthy has been consistently

overpraised. His admirers, detecting in his imaginative work — and particularly in his plays — the quality of moral earnestness, have taken him to their susceptible hearts as one of the supreme artists of our time; but it is as a creative artist, pure and simple, that he fails. He has many gifts, many qualities — technical ability, imaginativeness, sympathy, experience of life, ideas, ideals; but the one supreme, essential gift — the ability to create living men and women working out their destinies in the grip of fate — is not his. He is ridden by his ideas, harried by his ideals; he has no spaciousness, no ease, no geniality; and his characters are invariably irritatingly true to type and the instruments for their author's views on sociology, politics and what not.

Mr Galsworthy's "views"! How devastatingly "present" they always are! As he writes, they continually rise to the surface of his mind, trickle from his pen, and litter his every page. His latest book is strewn with the debris of "liberal" views on morality, fraternity, class hatred, the *nouveaux riches*, and so on. The entire machinery of his most recent plays — *A Bit o' Love*, *The Foundations*, and *The Skin Game* — has been engineered solely in order to enable Mr Galsworthy to air the "latest" and (of course!) the most broad-minded opinions on such questions as the Christian attitude towards sexual morality, the stupidity of our present methods of eliminating social injustice, and the eternal quarrel between the uneducated and traditionless rich and the well-bred poor. And on every page one sees the judicial mind at work. Not a point is made by one side that is not immediately countered by an equally good point in favour of the other; for Mr Galsworthy will not have it thought for a moment

that he is not scrupulously fair. He holds the balance: you must be the judge. Every play of his is a summing-up of all the available evidence; indeed so tender is his conscience that he is, perhaps, more careful to present a good case for what he believes to be wrong than he is to support his own.

For he *has* a case of his own. Reading between the lines of *A Bit o' Love*, for example, one is well aware that his sympathies are on the side of the Rev. Michael Strangway, who, in order that his wife, whom he worships, may live comfortably in adultery, consents not to appeal to the Divorce Court. This man Strangway is a peculiarly Galsworthian character. "There is something about the whole of him that makes him seem not quite present. A gentle creature, burnt within." It has become a habit with Mr Galsworthy to make these gentle, hypersensitive creatures and then put them on the rack of what, one imagines, he would call prejudice or, maybe, religious or social intolerance. By this method the heart is untouched, but the nerves are lacerated. He is sufficiently skilful and in earnest to win over the emotional reader and momentarily to blur his conception of what is right and what is wrong. Strangway suffers horribly — not, as it is made to appear, so much from the uncharitableness of his neighbours and the wickedness of his wife, as from his own lack of strength, his own dubious personality. He is not a modern St Francis of Assisi to whom everything is "brother or sister," but a weakling deceived by love and, one must conclude, by a kind of spiritual vanity. One may grant passion to a man who, as Strangway does, goes to his wife's wardrobe and, in her long absence, snuffs at her clothing; nevertheless one doubts the nature of that passion when one

discovers that he had for a time lived as man and wife with Beatrice without having even a momentary suspicion that she had no love for him. This passionate, eccentric curate does not escape the slightly amused contempt that even the charitable feel towards the cuckold.

Strangway, indeed, is a lay figure; we see him for only a few hours, but we recognise him as a creature made solely to embody his creator's ideas. Each incident is contrived in order that those ideas shall be burned deeply into the reader's suffering and apprehensive mind. Even Nature herself is dragged in and compelled to synchronise with the moment's mood. Strangway, deserted by his wife, mutters to himself. "Gone! What is there now?" Pat on this comes the stage direction: "the sound of an owl's hooting is floating in." At another opportune moment, when the stage is crying out for it, there "comes the sound of music." It is artificial. Strangway is artificial. The entire play is artificial, and it is so because the characters, the setting and the action of the play have all been brought into being by Mr Galsworthy's unresisting impulse to state a thesis and then, by inference, to prove it. One almost expects to find at the close of the final act the Euclidean letters Q.E.D.

The Skin Game has the same defects, though they are more carefully concealed. It states the claims of democracy (shall we call it?) in the person of Hornblower, "a man newly rich," to take away the privileges and wound the susceptibilities of the aristocracy, personified in Hillcrist, "a country gentleman." Here the creature made to suffer is Chloe, Hornblower's daughter-in-law with a vividly scarlet past, and with her the entire family into which she is married. Here the characters are more human, and less the vehicle of

ideas, simply because those ideas themselves are, so to speak, of a lower grade. And yet, in spite of this, everything, to the last detail, is made to "fit": the scheme is entire: the machine runs beautifully, but it is always a machine. The people are born from the ideas, not the ideas from the people. Mr Galsworthy, in fact, remains the desiccated artist he always was.

When, in his *Autobiographical Fragment*, F. W. H. Myers referred to himself as a "fusion of a minor poet and an amateur savant," he was not indulging in that self-depreciation which, because criticism is feared, forestalls all criticism and thereby escapes it. Though of aristocratic mind and temper, he was by nature humble in spirit, and the experiences of his inner life were of a kind likely to induce distrust of his imaginative gift. In youth there was no influence in his life comparable to Hellenism "in the fullest sense of that word"; but lonely travel in Greece and a too ardent worship of vanished beauties and ideals long dead left him unsatisfied and, though he never actually cast off the Christian faith, he was essentially "re-converted" to Christianity on his return to England. But, gradually and insensibly, the celestial vision faded; the process of disillusion, though slow, was inexorable, and the final stage of spiritual disintegration was reached when he began to experience the necessity of "an inward make-believe." In 1871 Henry Sidgwick first spoke to him of "ghosts"; two years later he stumbled across his "first personal experience of forces unknown to science." Thereafter he devoted himself exclusively to the investigation of what in modern jargon are termed "spiritualistic phenomena." His poetical career was practically closed.

I do not propose to treat Myers as a subject for psychological study and inquiry, though such a study would repay both time and effort. But no one can doubt that among the causes that drove him to scientific work was the exhaustion of his narrow vein of poetry. Early in life he had extracted nearly all his precious ore. His was the kind of nature that required the inner stimulus of definite belief to quicken his imagination. The external world to him was merely an apparition: it could not provide food for the nourishment of his spirit. In his essay on Poe, Myers thinks it worth while to point out that few verse-writers "have been more barren than Poe of any serious 'message.'" But Myers was all message. Hellenism gone, Christianity outlived — what was there left? So the man who, for many years, had sought truth in philosophy, metaphysics and poetry itself was compelled, in the end, to collect and collate mere facts and in them secure the spiritual and intellectual consolation for which he had always yearned. It may be that he never appreciated the bitter irony of his life and never reflected that the "facts" he so assiduously hunted down were at best of doubtful origin, and offered to most reasonable people greater difficulties of belief than the dogmas which, once jealously guarded, were now cast aside.

There is a quality of maturity in Myers's very early work that presages speedy decay. At the age of fifteen he entered for the national Robert Burns Centenary competition, submitting a poem that by many is regarded as equal to anything Chatterton wrote at that age:

"So in deep ambrosial night
Falls a star from heaven's height;

Mad for earth, a sliding spark
Down the deadness of the dark,
Falleth, findeth his desire,
Loseth his celestial fire,
Quenched to iron, like his love,
For her face is fair above;
But within her heart is stone,
Adamant and chalcedon."

Here is thought expressed in no small measure in unborrowed phrases: the boy's eyes have seen and seen vividly. But his poem, *The Prince of Wales at the Tomb of Washington*, which obtained the Chancellor's Medal at the Cambridge Commencement in 1861, is still more remarkable. Though written at the age of seventeen, it reveals a mature mind moulding at ease shapely verse that is full of close thinking, ardent aspiration and great nobility of expression.

But Myers was never to write great poetry. He was in all things a child, and in many things a victim, of his own time. He could not stand alone either in thought or in feeling. It was not his own independent thinking that robbed him of Christianity; the pillars of his belief were slowly undermined by the thought, and very largely by the example, of others. W. K. Clifford, Swinburne, Frederic Harrison and George Eliot, all among his own group, influenced him profoundly; he could not stand up against the torrent of their exultantly sad eloquence. On his verse, too, is stamped the image of other men. He referred to Tennyson always in terms of undisciplined admiration, and declared that he had never looked upon, "and shall never look upon," a greater man. That reverence all but hypnotised Myers into plagiarism; certainly it induced

him to employ an almost exclusively Tennysonian vocabulary, and the diligent student may find hundreds of cases where Myers prefixes the inevitable Tennysonian adjective to his noun. His poetry is full of echoes — *e.g.* “the passion which is Spain,” “dreams that mock the day,” “the soul’s own Prayer is answer for the soul.” Frequently he repeated himself in thought and sometimes in expression. At the age of fifteen he wrote the line “And glory broadens from the plunge of death”; the vivid metaphor stuck in his mind and, many years later, reappeared in “Fairer and stronger for the plunge of death.” His sense of humour was imperfect, and there is much in his collected poems that a robust masculine mind could not have written. The first stanza of *Love and Faith* cannot be read without a smile —

“Lo if a man magnanimous and tender,
 Lo if a woman, desperate and true,
 Make the irrevocable sweet surrender,
 Show to each other what the Lord can do” —

and though he wrote no line so steeped in bathos as Keats’s “the poor patient oyster,” his weak lines almost equal in number the lines that are good.

But Myers, we feel, very justly described himself in his “minor poet and amateur savant.” He will live longer as an investigator, a recorder, than as an exponent. In the realm of science he unscientifically held convictions that had but small support in fact. More than once he refers to his belief that “all things done are somehow photographed imperishably upon the Universe.” What a strange choice of terms even for an amateur savant!

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A desiccation of the emotions and a studied reliance on the intellect rob Mr Eliot's essays on poetry and criticism of that which gives criticism its greatest value. He flatters his readers by not "writing down" to them, but his inability to communicate the pleasure he has derived from literature and his refusal to reveal to his readers the mysteries he himself has penetrated become, in the end, an irritation, an offence. His voice is level. He has no gesture. Scholarship, acuteness of mind, delicacy of perception and many ideas are his; but though he writes of poetry, he is coldly detached from it, and though life is the stuff of literature, we cannot feel that he has ever lived. It is a disembodied voice that speaks. The result is an extraordinary brittleness, even when truth is spoken; the moment a conclusion, after much painful groping, is reached, it dissolves into dust.

This separation of the writer from the matter he criticises is, in Mr Eliot's case, both self-conscious and self-imposed. Erudition, he points out in his little volume, *The Sacred Wood*, "is useless unless it enables us to see literature all round, to detach it from ourselves, to reach a state of pure contemplation," and he praises two American writers because they "have endeavoured to establish a criticism which should be independent of temperament." But he goes farther than this. In his extraordinarily clever and provocative essay, *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, he asserts that "the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality." This, on the face of it, is so demonstrably untrue that Mr Eliot is driven to adopt a theory, for the discovery of which we are willing to give him sole credit, that the poet has not a "personality" to express, but "a

particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways." The obvious retort, of course, is: "If a poet has no personality, why does his progress depend on the extinction of that which he does not possess?" Mr Eliot, it appears to us, is merely begging the question. His "particular medium" is but another term for personality; but things are not altered by giving them different names. He foresees this objection and, in attempting to defeat it, loses himself in a jungle of words. For example: "The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all." Here is chaos. When Mr Eliot states that emotions never experienced by a poet will "serve his turn as well as those familiar to him," he seems to suggest that emotion, *per se*, is of no value to the imaginative writer. That is, we are warmed by a man with an ice-cold heart. But we know from the statements of poets themselves that this is not so. Emotion must precede and feed poetry, though at the moment of creation the writer may have all the "tranquillity" that has been ascribed to him. One of the essentials that go to the making of a great poet is that he shall feel greatly, diversely: he must have universality of emotion. Imagination is the key to all the emotions that are not inherent in the psychology of the individual.

Mr Eliot is on surer ground when he writes on critics, though, perhaps because less intellectual effort has here been demanded of him, his work is not free from carelessness. He declares that as a critic, or "appreciator," Swinburne makes "hardly more than two judgments

which can be reversed or even questioned"; but on the same page Swinburne's judgment is said to be only "generally" sound. There are sudden and very unexpected signs of caution, and these occur in places where it is obvious no caution is necessary — *e.g.*, "There must probably be conceded to history a few 'many-sided' men. Perhaps Leonardo da Vinci was such." Yet Mr Eliot never seeks safety behind the defences of "perhaps" and "probably" when fighting in really dangerous territory. Sometimes he becomes obsessed by a word. In his essay on *Imperfect Critics*, for example, we have an "important" poet, an "important" mind, an "important" judgment, an "important" critic, "important" books. In this same essay we are told that "Matthew Arnold was intelligent," and that Mr Whibley's edition of Urquhart's *Rabelais* "contains all the irrelevant information about that writer which is what is wanted to stimulate a taste for him."

It is clear from Mr Eliot's rather congested style, so closely packed with thought, that we have in this book a mind laboriously and honestly at work to discover principles of criticism free from the weakening and distorting influences of temperament. It is equally clear that Mr Eliot's own criticism is coloured — or, rather, deprived of colour — by his temperament. Yet his writing is not always laborious, and if, because of his tendency to indulge in ellipses, we lose the thread of his argument, he sometimes helps us to an understanding by a graphic metaphor, or a vivid presentation of the core of his thesis. He says of Swinburne's critical work: "One is in risk of becoming fatigued by a hubbub that does not march; the drum is beaten, but the procession does not advance." In writing of

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George Wyndham, he very aptly declares that "the Arts insist that a man shall dispose of all he has, even of his family tree, and follow art alone." Again: "Tennyson is a very fair example of a poet almost wholly encrusted with parasitic opinion, almost wholly merged in his environment." This epigrammatic manner is only occasional, and I am far from saying that in it Mr Eliot's great ability is most fully disclosed. It is in the least lucid of his pages that we become most aware of original and distinctive gifts striving to discover a mode of utterance, a vehicle, for his crowding thoughts.

CHAPTER XX

PRESENT-DAY BOHEMIANISM

I DO not write of the sordid, forced Bohemianism of Murger which Puccini, with his brutal sentimentalism, has made so offensive. But I write of those two or three years that prefaced the war. Those years, for artists at least, and for all to whom the things of the spirit were of paramount importance, were years of easy gaiety. Life was a holiday in which work brought more pleasure than play. I do not say artists were happy, for artists are rarely happy. But artists could, without difficulty, enjoy the abundant pleasure that was abroad. For all men (all men, except the greatest men) who create, pleasure is a necessity: they must have something to take the place of that happiness which can never be theirs. In 1913-1914 art seemed to many a "great escape. There was magic again in life — real magic."

That magic, of course, has gone, never in our time to return. The young, who have not yet suffered, may one day feel it, but we shall never feel it — we who during the war passed from youth into the early years of middle age. It was not altogether a harmless magic. There was a corrosive quality in its exciting wine. Many were drunk with an only half-understood Nietzscheism. Men and women adventured their souls perilously, and some met disaster. But it was a time of hard work, of new buoyant life, of experiment and achievement. In all directions — in painting, science,

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applied science, music, literature, geographical exploration — enormous energy was being spent throughout Europe.

There was no meeting-place, no common platform, for these fifty thousand or so youthful spirits. But a voice in Florence would be answered by someone in Brussels, and a cry of ecstasy in Paris would find an echo in London. A few figures made a gigantic effort to bind together these fellow-spirits, and Marinetti, that clever fool of Europe, seemed on the point of achieving some kind of unity in the early summer of 1914. . . . Marinetti is a man of a goat-like genius: a capering fellow. But when I met him in the Café Royal I found nothing but a lean, disgruntled man devoured by a passionate egoism: a Savonarola of the arts. He had a lust for notoriety; of talent he possessed but a modicum. Almost he spat in the face of the public; it was, he knew, an easy way to attract attention. "The most remarkable thing about Marinetti," C. R. W. Nevinson once said to me, "is his gift of being in two, and sometimes three, different places at one and the same time. Here am I, at this moment, in London; but when you open to-morrow's paper I dare say you will find that yesterday Marinetti was in Budapest, New York and Ecclefechan. But yet there are not three Marinettis, but only one." Certainly Marinetti had that energy and vitality that are the womb of genius. And he was a marvellous press agent. It is the newspapers that make our small men great; Marinetti knew this, and though he was never anything more than a small artist, he was for a year or two a great figure.

Paradoxically enough, it was because in those pre-war days our younger artists were so much in earnest

that they were deceived by this caperman. (There! — I have coined a word. And rather a good word, I think.) They felt themselves in need of something, but they knew not what it was. They desired to externalise themselves; from within they pushed outwards; they were restless, and they wished to rid themselves of their unease. In a word, they were potential artists without the vehicle for self-expression. Now if there was one thing in the world that Marinetti could do, he could express himself. It was his power of self-expression, his effrontery disguised as courage, and his anarchistic gospel that, to the young artist, were so alluring. As I have said, men and women, seeking an unknown, dimly felt beauty, adventured their souls perilously. Reason almost tottered at the easel and desk. The 1913-1914 movement had its analogy in the decadent movement of the nineties; artists were in deadly earnest, but in their lives they were unconsciously seeking self-destruction. They overlooked the fact that though it is the aim and the duty of the artist to express himself, he can do so only by imposing upon himself a studious self-reservation.

But though there was much that was hectic and lurid in the artistic Bohemia of pre-war days, there was a fine, natural camaraderie that the war appears to have destroyed. Artists were more sociable, more ardent even, than they are to-day. In spite of their almost terrible seriousness, they had a sense of humour. Cliques could not exist, for they were destroyed by laughter before they were formed. Cleverness was so much taken for granted that it was never mentioned, as it is now, in advancing the claims of a particular man to special attention. In those days a stupid man could not frequent the Café Royal; but to-day that

gilded chamber of ghosts is full of third-rate journalists. . . . C. R. W. Nevinson has recently declared that sitting and talking in the Café Royal is his favourite recreation. Certainly the company one finds there does, by comparison, give one a good conceit of oneself.

To-day, in the arts, there is a heavy moral earnestness in the air. I have nothing to say against moral earnestness, so long as it is of the right kind, and so long as it functions in the proper manner. . . . I do not stop to consider what the "right kind" and the "proper manner" may be. . . . But without humour even moral earnestness is barren. No, not quite barren, for it does produce a huge progeny of prigs. Read, for example, any one of those pained and painful discussions that take place from time to time in the correspondence columns of *The Manchester Guardian*, *The Nation* and *The New Statesman*. (Rarely a week passes but I do not resolve never again to read one or the other of these papers; nevertheless I always do read them.) You will find there a studied and insolent urbanity, a tenderness of conscience that is self-consciously righteous, and a philistinism born of desiccated emotions. It is like the earnest argument of disembodied intellects. No gleam of humour anywhere. No flash of wit. No solitary smile. . . . Our modern intellectuals would persuade us to the belief that these are sorry and dreadful days and that only they have the power to create a new heaven. Their note is contempt: carefully veiled contempt: contempt in the guise of a B. and S. Webbistic humanitarianism. Does Mr Middleton Murry ever retire into a corner and smile at himself? Does Mr A. N. Monkhouse even for a brief

moment forget that, at all costs, he must never cease to be "kind"? Has Mr Massingham ever considered that his righteous indignation may, on occasion, be merely ordinary bad temper? . . . Men who never doubt themselves are, it is true, men of power; but they are extremely dangerous.

This depression of moral earnestness is easy to understand, and no doubt it will soon pass; but in the meantime it has to be endured. To insist day by day that Europe is ill is not to make Europe better. But if Europe is ill, London is very sick indeed. How sick London is only those can estimate who, taking their life and their sanity into their hands, dive once or twice into the rather murky depths of her pseudo-literary life. In those depths will be found an irritability and a humourless jealousy to which only the pen of George A. Birmingham could do justice. . . . In Fleet Street men and women, though quite as gifted as those who earn their living by writing books, never spoil themselves by assuming airs of superiority: they are as genial and modest a fraternity as one can meet. But writers of books — and, more especially, those who write books but cannot get them published — are soured by conceit. They are all devastatingly clever; so much so, indeed, that when one meets them one feels how delightful it is to be just a little dull.

But among these self-consciously clever people are those who regard themselves as even more clever than the rest; they unite themselves into little societies and clubs, give themselves high-sounding names, and abandon themselves wildly to talk. Any kind of talk, rather than no talk: the first that comes: and the first that comes is chatter about themselves.

Of these little societies the most high-brow and, to

my mind, the most ridiculous is the To-morrow Club. Formed for the purpose of introducing aspirants to literary fame to those who have already "arrived," it holds weekly meetings at which coffee is drunk, and before which famous or slightly notorious people like myself give lectures. Among the former are Lord Lytton, Lady Rhondda, Mrs Belloc-Lowndes, Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith, Mr Stacy Aumonier, Mr Austin Harrison, Mr Herbert Jenkins, Mr J. D. Beresford, Miss Lena Ashwell and Mr Charles Marriott. These people, it will be admitted, are quite inoffensively clever — that is to say, they do their day's work without unnecessary fuss or noise, and occupy their place in the general scheme of things without continually insisting that that place is a noticeably high one. If they are intellectuals, they do not label themselves so. Not so their listeners. The few hundred "aspirants" who come to hear them are consciously, arrogantly and ineptly "intellectual." They sit and smoke in one of the smaller rooms of the Caxton Hall and glower at the speaker. They are not listening: they are frantically preparing the speeches they themselves will make the moment the lecturer has done. They sit tightly with pressed lips, their little egos burning brightly, their starved vanity stirring wildly and painfully within them. They hate the lecturer for a variety of reasons: firstly, because he is speaking and they are not; secondly, because he has won some of the success which is not yet theirs; most of all, because they feel he is quite an inferior kind of person, and they know that they themselves are the real brains of England.

But if they detest the lecturer, their feeling for each other is bitter loathing. Let me tell you. Not very

long ago I was taken in a taxi-cab to Caxton Hall. In my pocket reposed the lecture I was to give. It was entitled "Living Dangerously" — just the sort of title I knew would attract the To-morrowish high-brows. They expected from me an immoral outburst, an exhortation to commit daring sins; instead, I gave them a spiritual discourse. Before I began my lecture I was approached by various members of the club who very earnestly warned me against a few of their fellow-members. "You see that man over there? Well. Not quite. . . . You know. Bats in the belfry. He's sure to speak, but you mustn't mind what he says. . . . We're a curious lot, Mr Cumberland. Half of us are mad, quite mad. A society of freaks. Not all, mind you. Still. There! — you see that woman — the tall one. Well. She's — how shall I put it? — the things she *writes*! Really *dreadful*! But clever — well, yes: there's plenty of cleverness in these people. One of us has just had a manuscript accepted. Exciting, isn't it?"

Looking at some of the faces before me, I could well believe all that was not told me. But I was soon to test the intellectual quality of my audience.

At the beginning of my lecture I had placed two or three of those fatuous remarks which, when put in the form of an epigram, have the appearance of being brilliantly clever, but which, in reality, are abysmally stupid. When I wrote them I did not in the least know what they meant; I do not know now. But my listeners seemed to know, for they rocked with laughter. "An audience of fools," said I to myself; "an audience of fools, sick with their own cleverness." And so it was. A foolish fool can be tolerated, but a clever fool is anathema maranatha.

The speeches that followed had that striving, stretching and brittle cleverness that is symptomatic of failure. Each speaker was anxious not to discuss the subject of my lecture — an attack on the psycho-analytical novel — but to prove to us what a desperate dog he was, to reveal that he himself was a writer and was about to be published (vaguely) “soon,” and to declare that he also would write novels if, alas! there were not too many novels already. . . . One man, fixing his eyes on the ceiling for a long time, gave utterance to interminable sentences, every word of which seemed filled with sibilants; he hissed himself into prominence, ignoring my poor lecture, but presenting us with a long autobiography in the form of an attack on the previous speaker. Up got a third man and attacked the second, a fourth who attacked the third, a fifth who attacked them all. I was reminded of that most delicious *Punch* drawing of a few years ago: “A German family enjoying its morning hate.” The air was thick and muddy with egotism, vanity, failure, wounded susceptibilities. Nevertheless no bitterness of previous speakers deterred still another from rising, and when he did rise it was the same old story — hard, aggressive nonsense, bits of autobiography, startling but unintentional scraps of self-revelation.

Such is post-war intellectualism; such is the Bohemia of 1923. When I compare artistic and literary circles of to-day with those circles of 1913–1914, I see that all that was good in Bohemia has vanished. Good-fellowship has gone, modesty is dead, and the only laughter that is left is like the crackling of thorns under a pot; our young hopefuls are eaten up with arrogance, smeared over with the ineffectiveness of crawling vanity. . . . The little are invariably made bitter by failure, so

they seek out new clubs and societies, and put out their tongues at each other, and place their thumbs to their noses.

And yet success in the literary world of to-day is so easy a matter. If a man has any real talent, that talent will be snapped up at once by editors or publishers. There is no editor or publisher in London who is not a-strain to find new and original work. But our tens of thousands of aspirants will not believe this. They are confident their neglect is due to the blindness and stupidity of those to whom they offer their wares. Poor little people who are so easily self-deluded, who, faced by adversity, so speedily become bitter. . . . Fleet Street — thank Heaven! — is still a place where merry souls may be met, where good-fellowship comes easily, and where generosity of feeling and of judgment is common. But in the little coteries, the little clubs, the little societies . . .

There are those who, though possessing no literary talent themselves, are nevertheless anxious to appear before the world as authors. They have money, and they are prepared to pay well for the privilege of seeming to have written a book. During the twelve months or so immediately following upon the end of the war quite a number of these people were in London, and at least one literary agent was kept busy hunting for “ghosts” and arranging terms with them. But there emerged a super-ghost: a gentleman who conceived the brilliant idea of engaging ghosts to do for him his own ghost-work. He is a well-known writer: I do not think there is in the kingdom a railway book-stall that does not exhibit some of his works. . . . I say he is a “well-known writer.” But I have been told he cannot

write. I have been told that he has never been able to write. I do not know. . . . However, this enterprising fellow, if not gifted with a literary talent, had a sound commercial instinct. His lowest price for "providing" a novel of ninety thousand words was £100: sometimes he obtained more — much more, but never less. It was a simple matter for him to get other people to do the work for £50. The super-ghost pocketed the difference.

It seems strange to me that anybody in the world can be found who is willing to write ninety thousand words for £50. The mere writing down of the words is a colossal task, though you who do not "write" have perhaps no notion of the enormous labour involved. What you read in six or eight hours takes an average kind of author six or eight months to write. Still, there are passionate, vehement people whose lust for words is so invincible that they will knock you off ninety thousand words every fortnight without turning a hair (how *does* one turn a hair?). £50 a fortnight is £1300 a year: a tidy sum in these days. . . . Guy Boothby used to speak his yarns into a dictaphone: that seems a simple way until you try it. But the usual method is to sit down to a typewriter from nine A.M. till lunch-time and knock off a trifle of six to seven thousand words.

Recently I visited a circulating library with a well-known novelist — a man who, it is generally agreed, possesses genius, but whose sale is strictly limited. . . . Genius and limited sales? Yes. George Gissing was glad to get £50 for each of his lengthy and patient novels. . . . My friend took down one volume after another from the shelves, hunting for something that would give him pleasure. Suddenly, "Hello!" he said, "this is a thing I wrote." He handed me a novel that bore on its title-page a name I did not know.

"Really!" said I; "are you, then, a ghost?"

"Yes. One has to live."

"What is this yarn about?"

"I haven't the remotest notion."

"Oh, but, surely! When did you write it?"

"Last year."

"But you must remember *something* about it!" I protested.

"I assure you, on my word of honour, that I don't recollect a single thing."

"Try it," I said, opening the book in the middle, and putting it into his hands.

He began to read. His brows were knitted and in his eyes was a puzzled, baffled look. He turned over the pages quickly, reading a paragraph here and there. Then, with a gesture of intense disgust, he closed the volume and put it back on the shelf.

"It makes me feel sick. Let's go out into the open air."

As we walked down the busy street (we were in Maidenhead) I looked at him quizzically, though in my heart I realised that so sensitive and delicate a nature as his must have paid heavily in attempting to write "popular" work.

"You'd rather not talk about it?" I asked.

"I don't know. Perhaps not. But what do you want to know?"

"Well — was that story so very bad?"

"Unspeakable. Undiluted tripe. Raw, horrid tripe."

"But how do you do it?"

"Ah! — there you have me. I can't tell you. But I happen to be a very quick typist. I can do forty words a minute and can keep that speed up indefinitely. I sit

down at my machine and try not to think. The less I think, the quicker I work. I let it flow. Bilge. Out of a tap — I mean a sewer. Fifty quid, Cumberland. I did that beastly thing in ten days — and it takes me a year's hard work to write one of my own novels."

Many writers who are now famous and prosperous have, at one time or another, had to turn to literary work they loathed. But I do not know of a single case of a "high-brow" writer being able to write a "popular" book that really was popular in the sense that Ruby M. Ayres, Alice and Claude Askew and Ethel M. Dell are popular. (I do not sniff at those writers; their work shows far more talent than is possessed by most of those who envy their sales.) Popularity cannot be achieved; it arrives, as it were, by divine accident. You are either popular or you are not; if you are not, no effort of yours will make you so.

The new Bohemians are great at log-rolling. In the nineties log-rolling, after having been for some years a delicate and secret art, became blatant and unashamed. Men of the same type of genius came together quite naturally, banded themselves into clubs, and assiduously puffed each other's wares. Most writers of books are reviewers of books. Some of them have two or even three names. The vast public did not know that the late Sir William Robertson Nicoll wrote journalism under the pseudonyms of "A Man of Kent" and "Claudius Clear." Sometimes it would happen that Sir William, "Claudius Clear" and "A Man of Kent" would unite in praising a particular book, and the newspaper-reading public would form the idea that three critics, not one, had been favourably impressed. This practice, in unscrupulous hands, might have been

employed most unjustly; in any case, it can never be strictly cricket. If Sir William had used his three names — I believe he had a fourth — to condemn a good book which, through prejudice or for some personal reason, he disliked, he would undoubtedly have been guilty of dishonesty. But he never did.

To-day log-rolling is becoming as prevalent and as brazen as it was thirty years ago. But instead of being, as it were, controlled from three or four different centres, it is now directed from only one. The Georgian Poets are at the moment very powerful in the more literary monthlies, weeklies and dailies. Not only do they excel in praising each other's books, but they unite in condemning many of those written by men and women who do not belong (and do not wish to belong) to their particular set. In the nineties the sole criterion of literary work was its literary value. To-day it is not so. Social position and an implacable respectability are regarded as necessary qualifications for the worker in literature.

The only newspaper known to me that signs or initials all its book reviews (even its notices of novels) is *The Manchester Guardian*. I do not like *The Manchester Guardian*: indeed I hate its academic and inhuman "fair-mindedness," its unctuous blindness, its Cranford delicacy, its resolve to think the best of our former enemies and the worst of ourselves: nevertheless I do very strongly feel that *The Manchester Guardian* has in this matter set an example that should be followed by all newspapers. The public has the right to know who is praising or condemning a book, a musical composition, a picture, a politician, a town councillor. Even leading articles should be signed. . . . When, ten years ago, W. A. Ackland was editing *The*

Manchester Courier with such zest and great ability I tried to persuade him to this point of view.

"But," said he, "the public has no interest whatever in the writers of articles. Take *The Manchester Guardian*. You, as a journalist, may know who J. B., S.L., C.E.M., J.E.A., and A.N.M. are, but then you are one in a hundred; ninety per cent. of that paper's readers neither know nor care what names those initials represent. And if they did know, they would be none the wiser."

I think Ackland was wrong. I believe that people who read a certain section of a newspaper regularly—book reviews, musical criticism, or what not—do like to know what particular men contribute to that section. If a piece of criticism is signed, then in most cases one knows what amount of reliance can be placed on that criticism. Perhaps no reliance at all can be placed on it. Moreover, if every critic were compelled to sign his work, criticism of all kinds would become more responsible. To be hit by an unknown man is, at the least, disconcerting; to be praised by him merely arouses one's curiosity.

CHAPTER XXI

AUSTIN HARRISON — NICOLAI SOKOLOFF — A. A. BAUMANN — J. NICOL DUNN — KEIGHLEY SNOWDEN —
ALEISTER CROWLEY

WHEN Austin Harrison became editor of *The English Review* few readers of that magazine expected him to improve it. Their expectations were not falsified. Ford Madox Hueffer (now Ford Madox Ford) was an editor of genius. If I were a millionaire I should offer him £10,000 a year to edit a literary monthly. I have no doubt I should lose money, but I should get something much better: I should get each month one day's fine reading.

Austin Harrison has enormous ability, but he is not a reliable judge of literature. His mind is not reflective; he cares too passionately for things, for facts, to have much room for ideas. Almost all his work has been criticism of social, political and international affairs; it has been good criticism, but it was out of place in a literary organ. And he tried to make the *The English Review* a literary organ. If he had kept Norman Douglas . . . but he didn't keep Norman Douglas. . . . I think Douglas must have always regarded his work with Austin Harrison with amusement mixed with irony. I remember him well as he stood by listening heavily and with inscrutable face to a fantastic argument between Harrison and myself in which I asserted, without any evidence whatsoever, that criminals could be converted into saints if they were only knocked on

the head in the right place. Harrison was deeply interested, concerned even. "Write it, my dear fellow, write it," he said.

That was one of Harrison's limitations as an editor. He had no humour. I must have met him half-a-dozen times, but never once did I see him smile. He liked to walk up and down the room, imitating an ancestral voice prophesying war and woe. There was, it seemed, no money in the world. (This was early in 1919.) We were all in for a deuce of a time. Brain-workers especially. Perhaps there would be a revolution. On the other hand, perhaps there would not be a revolution. . . . He failed to arouse me, and I boldly introduced a new subject.

"There will be some good writing now," I said.

"Yes? No. Where are our writers? Nothing is being written. No one has anything to say. And Aleister Crowley has gone to America."

"Seriously?"

"How do you mean — seriously?"

"Does it matter where Aleister Crowley is?"

"Perhaps not — so long as he continues to write."

"Crowley writes?"

"Of course. He has written in *The English Review*."

At this point Harrison began to talk in capitals.

"Quite," I said.

"Crowley is a Man of Genius. A Poet . . ."

But I forbear to record all the wonderful things that Austin Harrison said Crowley was. . . . All the use I have for Crowley is his invention of a variation of bridge. Most ingenious.

Harrison failed as an editor because he never made any consistent search for good work. He printed what the post brought him. He printed stories I sent him,

but he did so only because I insisted they were good. He was easily impressed by other people's opinions. I remember a telephone conversation I had with him.

"Are you going to print my story, *Under the Act*?"

"It's so disagreeable."

"Yes. I know. Life is sometimes."

"But quite a lot of people have written to me saying the *Review* is getting unpleasant. I am losing readers."

"Do you mind?"

"Every editor minds losing readers."

"Yes. But you! Well, I should have thought it would depend on the kind of readers. Now, I don't mind losing readers. I don't want people to read me who don't like my work."

"But your story *is* unpleasant."

"It's a tragedy, Harrison. Something horrid happens. You can't make horrid things pleasant."

"But why do you write horrid things?"

"Ah! You must ask Freud. I like them. As Tennyson said, they come. Voices whisper them to me."

"Really?"

"I assure you."

"Of course your work's awfully good, but ——"

"Listen. I wrote that story for you. No other magazine in the country would look at it. They like multitudes of readers. Anyone who pays them a bob. But I told myself that *The English Review* ——"

"Very well. I'll print it."

He did.

Nicolai Sokoloff was once described to me as "an American citizen of the best type." It was an American citizen of Welsh origin who so described him. But Sokoloff is a Russian by birth, and he has the temperament,

the appearance, and the accent of a Russian. The only American trait I discovered in him was his habit of wearing horn spectacles.

He is a born conductor, a born leader and manager of men. He has an air of utterly childlike simplicity — of engaging frankness — of the man who puts all his cards on the table before he begins even to think of talking. . . . But no orchestral conductor ever does that. In his social relationships a conductor is full of guile: he is compelled to be. He has many people to please — people of various temperaments and ideals, and only by a Machiavellian subtlety and a genius for flattery can he hope to remain at peace with the gentlemen and ladies of his committee, his guarantors, his public, and his players. Sokoloff, I am sure, can walk delicately. In far-away Cleveland — where, I am told, he has an orchestra second to none in the world — he has at the age of forty established himself artistically, socially and financially. . . . Financially. Well, America has advantages. Sokoloff's salary is enormous. If he wishes, he can retire before he is fifty and live in comfort for the rest of his life. And yet only in 1912 he was, so to speak, wandering about Manchester with no orchestra save the little band in Miss Horniman's theatre.

He is the type of man who, if asked how he has won his success, replies: "By hard work." And certainly he loves work. He has a dark passion for it. At rehearsals he takes off his coat. Does any British composer take off his coat at rehearsals? He does not, though it is true that between the acts of an opera Sir Thomas Beecham changes his shirt. . . . But I see I am beginning to drivel. What I mean is, Sokoloff is a real slogger, and a slogger of genius. The infinite capacity, etc. Like most Americans, he longs for success in

England almost as much as artistic Englishmen long for success in the States. But the Americans are not so commercial as we are. They desire our approval, our appreciation; but what we chiefly want is their money.

Culture? All Russians are cultured. Sokoloff reads voraciously. He has an instinct for beauty, however furtive. He lives for beauty, and wilts without it. And, in the sense that he is never suspicious of novelty, of originality in whatever guise it may appear, he is American through and through. It was Sokoloff who introduced me to the work of Eugene O'Neill long before O'Neill was known in this country. Sitting in a Golders Green drawing-room one Sunday afternoon, he rehearsed to me *The Emperor Jones*, and rehearsed it so admirably that I caught fire on the instant. . . . Some day, I suppose, he will settle down in England, if he can find scope for his energies. I hope he will. But England is very small, and, in spite of all the efforts of the last thirty years to educate the masses in orchestral music, less than one per cent. of our population has formed the habit of listening to orchestral music. . . . For example, in Portsmouth — the town in which I write — I know, I suppose, about one hundred people of education. But among that hundred there is not one who knows the difference between a Beethoven Symphony and a turnip-field.

Of all the editors I have worked under, Mr A. A. Baumann was the most paternal. When he was editing *The Saturday Review* he regarded me at first as a bright young lad who might be trusted to recognise a good novel when he read one. But almost at once I was given bigger fish to fry: Poets, Parsons and the

Polypapist. The polypapist was Lord Northcliffe. For months we tried to incorporate the word polypapist into the English language; but we failed, for I can find it in none of the newest dictionaries. It was of Baumann's coining, and he was immensely proud of it. If I possibly could, I dragged the Polypapist into every article I wrote. Not that I disliked Lord Northcliffe, but because Baumann did; and I knew the Polypapist would not care in the least what I or anybody else on *The Saturday Review* said about him.

Baumann was benign and kind. He hid a vigorous and combative mind behind a benevolent exterior. He was as wise as an owl and as calm. But, on occasion, he had a pen of vitriol. Yet all who worked under him felt for him both affection and a great esteem. He took trouble with his staff. He made friends of all his employees. When you did a piece of particularly good work for him, he was careful to let you know he was aware of the circumstance. . . . But the pay he gave us was small. He knew this and regretted it; but it was beyond his power to give us more.

"Really, my dear Cumberland, I don't know how you manage to live," he said on one occasion. "You're very versatile, I know; but journalism is a poor game."

"It is. But if I like it. I'd rather scrape together six or seven hundred a year by writing than get six or seven thousand by any other means."

He looked at me incredulously.

"You don't care for money?"

"I love it. But I like writing better."

He shook his head.

"How long did it take you to write this?" he asked, pointing to a two-column review in the last number of his paper.

"A day to read the book and another day to write the article."

"And all I give you is two guineas."

"Yes; but I make money more easily elsewhere. You see, people who write a lot of rubbish, as I do, salve their consciences by occasionally putting all they've got into a bit of good work. I'd rather do good work always, of course; but I've got a family dependent upon me. That's why I'm always annoyed when critics guy an artist for producing an occasional pot-boiler. Why, he's simply got to do it in order to obtain the leisure in which to produce his best work. For myself, I can't work on an empty stomach."

"You take yourself seriously."

"I do. Very. I don't imagine myself a heaven-sent genius, but I do think I am something of an artist. So I write saleable stuff in order to buy myself the leisure and the ease of mind necessary for me in doing my best work."

"*Set Down in Malice* — is that your best work?"

I laughed.

"No. But it made me some money. Some day I shall write a good novel."

"But there are so many good novels!"

"Then there will be one more."

He smiled vaguely, and I have no doubt he thought me a fool to want to do well what so many other men already do well.

J. Nicol Dunn was another kind editor. To me, indeed, he was, in his reserved, Scottish way, extraordinarily kind. It was Nicol Dunn who gave me my first chance in journalism. At that time — twelve years or so ago — I was a clerk in a waterproof works in Salford.

But I fancied myself as a musical critic, and Dunn, being at the moment without one, gave me a trial.

He was the most courteous of men. But, I think, a disillusioned and disappointed man. At any rate, during the period in which I worked for him, he was without enthusiasm, and without optimism. He directed *The Manchester Courier* with a stern hand and a most vigilant eye. In his office he was an autocrat — an autocrat with kindly manners. His attitude was: "We are all in this hopeless business of journalism together — and God alone knows how hopeless it is — but we must do our best; and the best you can all do is to obey me." We did.

His most peculiar characteristic was the Frankenstein-like memory that used to afflict Lord Macaulay. The most insignificant details of life clung to his memory like a leech to human flesh. Sometimes this unfailing memory was of great service to him; at others it was a nuisance.

It was my habit to take my work into his room at midnight. As he read it, I stood by his side. . . . I had begun that way, and I continued in it, though why I did so I hardly know, for on only two occasions did he alter my copy. (It had been arranged that my work should never be sub-edited.) . . . On one occasion he ran his pen through the phrase: "splendid but uneasy passion." I was writing of Wagner's Venusberg music. He looked up at me and smiled. "No," he said; "not that. You used that very phrase four weeks last Thursday. You are too good a writer to repeat yourself." It was as he had said. . . . On another occasion, he corrected a date. I had written: "Since the birth of Handel in 1686 . . ." He corrected the date to 1685. . . . "But," said I, "I thought you knew nothing of

music." "I don't," he replied; "but my head is full of facts about music."

It was, indeed, full of facts about everything.

But Nicol Dunn did not make good in Manchester: he did not understand the peculiar psychology of my native town: and he drifted to London. I remember his taking me to the old Press Club off Fleet Street on one of my very rare visits to London. Having introduced me to a few people, we sat down at a little table and began to drink whisky and water. That now seems to me one of the most wonderful hours I had ever experienced. In my starved, unsuccessful life I had often dreamed of an hour like that; but I had never believed my dream would come true — to sit with a Great Editor in the Press Club. Dunn, to whom at that time journalism was a weariness of the flesh, got some amusement out of my unsophisticated excitement. "Who is that man sitting alone by the fire?" I asked. "And who is the man who's just come in?" "Tell me who that is — the man in a top-hat." . . . I know now, though at the time I was all unsuspecting, that Dunn invented Big Names to please me and amuse himself. One of the men, he said, was A. B. Walkley: another was the proprietor of *The Daily Telegraph*. . . . Dunn sent me back to Manchester with the sensation of having been, for a brief hour, in the company of some of the Really Great People of the Earth. . . . Yes, he was a kindly and a good man, and I like to think he found my company amusing.

Keighley Snowden ought to have been a great journalist, for he has all the qualities, save one, that go to the making of successful newspaper men. His political writing on *The Daily Citizen* had dignity and authority;

moreover, it had style, and a continual freshness that only a vigorous mind can impart. His novels, also, have that freshness, but they lack the creative gift. But he possesses a self-effacing modesty that, in the rough and tumble of journalistic life, has always stood in his way. It is real modesty — not that odious self-deprecation that masks conceit. . . . I do not wish to seem to say that successful journalists are lacking in modesty; but, in my opinion, no man can succeed in the Press who has not a proper estimate of his own worth. That estimate Keighley Snowden lacks. It is a grave limitation. . . . Worse still — worse, from the point of view of material success — he has the habit of relinquishing work in order that a hard-up colleague may take it. I do not know any other man who does that. One admires and likes a man capable of such self-sacrifice; at the same time, one has to admit that if everyone possessed the same spirit little would be accomplished by anyone.

Aleister Crowley. . . . When, in 1912, I was about to leave Manchester for London, I was told by theosophical friends that Crowley was a magician. They breathed the word softly, solemnly. "A magician!" said I. "How splendid!" But they protested against my light tone, for they really believed he possessed occult powers. My theosophical friends believe a thousand things I cannot believe, so I laughed at them. Had I been able to regard Crowley as they did, I should have sought him out. I should like to meet a real live wizard.

If you frequent the Café Royal persistently enough you will, so they say, meet all the people who are worth meeting. A silly assertion. Still, some interesting men used to go there before the war, and it was at the Café Royal

that someone presented me to Crowley. He was a heavy, dark man, and he sat in a conspicuous place looking as picturesque as Nature would allow him. He discussed poetry with me. He was bewilderingly esoteric. I did not understand anything he said, but that did not prevent me from arguing with him. I could see that he was "out" to impress me, not because I was I, but because it was his business in life to impress people. I soon discovered how it came about that credulous people — for so I regard all theosophists — endowed him with gifts of wizardry. He used the jargon of occultism. He had the air of one who is familiar with secret things. He spoke with the authority of one who had been told.

I remained unimpressed. At least I did not react to his personality in the manner intended. I found him a bore.

WATERLOOVILLE, HANTS,
20th May 1923.

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